



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 76.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S ROAD AGENT ROUND-UP

OR
PANTHER PETE'S REVENGE



THE AUTHOR OF
'BUFFALO BILL'

A SHRIEK THAT ECHOED IN BUFFALO BILL'S EARS FOR MANY A DAY BROKE FROM THE OUTLAW'S LIPS AS HE FELL.



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1902, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.

No. 76.

NEW YORK, October 25, 1902.

Price Five Cents.

Buffalo Bill's Road-Agent Round-Up;

OR,

PANTHER PETE'S REVENGE.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

NED NORDECK'S BOX PARD.

When Ned Nordeck, the driver of the stage line between Fort Taos and Fort Summer, two posts on the far Western frontier, pulled out of Herders' Ranch, a mining settlement at which the coach stopped, his team going well, a cigar between his teeth, and a miner seated upon the box with him, he was not in the best of humors, for he had hoped to have the company of Lieutenant Willis, a bright, young officer stationed at Fort Taos, and who had been spending a few days at Herders' Ranch, on the long ride, instead, as he told Jack Tobin:

"A guy like that."

And he pointed to the man who was to be his outside passenger.

But Ned Nordeck admitted to himself that he had mistaken his man before he had ridden very far.

"Have another cigar, for yours is about burned out, pard," was the way the stranger broke the ice.

Ned accepted.

"Was it not about here that there was a big battle fought lately?" asked the stranger.

"Right on this ridge ahead, and Lieutenant Willis, of Taos, was the officer in command, along with Buffalo Bill, the great scout.

"It was a great victory for the soldiers."

"And the settlers, for Herders' Ranch and ther ranches turned out a'big force, and they caught the Injuns between ther soldiers and themselves, and, oh, my! Wal, ther redskins ain't quit wailin' over it yet, I guess."

Then Ned described the battle that had occurred there, which he knew nothing about, having heard no less than forty different versions regarding it, and the stranger listened attentively, at last remarking:

"You have driven this trail for years?"

"No, I ain't."

"I thought some one told me so."

"They was stuffin' yer, or lied knowingly, for drivers in these parts don't drive no trails for years."

"Why not?"

"They don't live long enough."

"Is the country unhealthy?"

"Wal, thar's a disease here thet are quite fatal ter many."

"What is it?"

"Bullet fever."

"Ah!"

"Then, the drivers catch it?"

"You bet they does!"

"Are many killed?"

"Wal, on ther Taos trail I drives, from Sandy Sink through Herders' to Fort Taos, a one-hundred-mile run, there has been five deaths in ther past three years."

"Five drivers have been killed?"

"Sure; and seven others has been run off ther trail, not wishin' ter go ter glory from a stage box, and two has been wounded so bad they is laid up, crippled."

"This is a bad record for the trail, indeed."

"Were you ever shot at?"

"Was I ever shot at?"

"Yes."

"Does yer see this wound in my left hand?"

"A bullet clipped a piece out off there; ther scar on my cheek?"

"Yes."

"A bullet clipped a piece out of there, and I has a piece o' lead in my leg now, and a wound in my body."

"Oh, yes, pard, I has been shot at sundry times, and I'm glad it was no worse."

"You are a brave man to still drive the trail."

"See here, pard, if I wasn't a brave man, I'd cut my throat, for a coward ought to die, and I don't mean ter praise myself, nuther."

"You expect to still stick to the trail, then?"

"Pard, I am a driver."

"I went into the work from love o' horses, driving, and to be out in God's fresh air, looking at the beauties of nature He had made."

"I took slim chances when I began, for it wasn't in the Injun and outlaw country; but, when I was sent here, I wouldn't back down when they told me this box had been the execution block of a number of good men."

"If better men than I be was willing to die here doing their duty, then I might risk it, I thought, and am still risking it, and, so far, has only been picked, but some day, or night, I'll get a bullet through my heart or brain, and then I will take the trail so many has gone before me, so many has yet ter go, and the end of which only the dead knows, for none ever come back."

"You take it very calmly."

"What is ther use o' frettin'?"

"I sleeps well when off duty, I comes up fer my feed three times a day, reg'lar; I enjoys a drink in season, a cigar on a drive, I likes a clever pard with me, shakes my foot at a fandango with a pretty gal, can swap a lie with any man, and enjoys living for all it is worth."

"I hates a mean man as I does a snake, don't pick no quarrels, nor allow no man to impose on me, and if ther outlaws sees their way clear ter kill and rob men fer gold, instead of work fer it, that's a matter with their own conscience, and if they gets into trouble, I hain't hard on 'em, fer they has ter answer fer their sins, not me."

"You are certainly a philosopher."

"Wal, I don't know what a philosopher is, but, as yer ain't had no reason ter call me bad names, maybe I is, ef yer say so, only don't explain if it's mean, for maybe you'd hev to hoof it on ter Taos."

The passenger laughed, and explained what a philosopher was, and Ned replied:

"You knows, fer you seem edicated, and I ain't got no more knowledge than what I picks up from what nature and human kind teaches me."

CHAPTER II.

THE OVERLAND DETECTIVE.

The passenger on the box with Ned seemed much entertained with his conversation, and asked him about the ride on beyond Taos.

"Waal, that's an all-kind-of-a-drive, rough, pleasant, dangerous, and safe, according to what turns up; but I has only been over it a few times, taking the place of Ben Bird, who were kilt by the Comanches, until they could put a reg'lar man on."

"And the ride from Herders' Ranch to Fort Sumner?" asked the stranger.

"That's another gantlet of death ter run, fer they knocks 'em over there more than they do on my drive."

"It's only a few weeks ago a driver was kilt and an army officer wounded, while the Cobras—that's the name the outlaws goes under—got big money from their haul; but a Lieutenant Balfour, at the fort, came ter Herders' Ranch, met Buffalo Bill, and they got ther money back, and downed some o' ther gang."

"Lem Luby is drivin' the run now, and he's about as game as they make 'em, pard."

"How is it when you meet Indians?"

"Run for it, like the deuce, shootin' as we goes."

"I've had two chases, and I knows what they is, so I drives race-horses in my team."

"And, if the Cobras hold you up, what do you do?"

"Pard, I is here ter perfect my passengers and freight, as far as it lies in my power to do, but I wasn't born a fool, and, if I sees ther chances are big ag'in me, I jist does ther right thing—lets 'em rob ther outfit, and pray ter some day get even."

"If I sees a chance, no odds is goin' ter make me let it go without a fight."

"You are a brave man, pard, and I hope you will long live to drive this trail," replied the passenger, and, after some further conversation, he said he was sleepy, and would get into the coach and have a nap where he did not fear falling off as if he dropped to sleep upon the box.

Ned drew rein for him, and he got inside.

As he drove on again, Ned mused to himself:

"Now, that man ain't sich a fool as I tuk him for."

"He's dressed rough, and looks like a gold digger, but he can talk like a edicated gent, and I guess he's seen better times than wild life out here."

"I hope he'll come up on ther box ag'in, for I finds him entertaining."

This was a fact, as Ned had done all the talking himself.

The passenger did come back on the box again, after an hour's ride inside, and said:

"Pard Nordeck, do you know who I am?"

"I doesn't."

"You have quite a rich freight along."

"Who said so?"

"I say so."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"You knows more than I does."

"No, I do not; but it is your duty to say that you have not."

"Now, I know that there is a large sum of greenbacks, government money besides, with valuable express matter for the fort, and an important registered mail."

"You thinks you has it down fine."

"I have, as you will see."

He took from his pocket an official envelope, and, taking a letter from it, read:

"Detective Carrol, of the United States Secret Service Corps, is hereby commanded to select a guard of picked men from his force, and guard the mail coach, that carries a large sum of money to the First National Bank in Santa Fe, also some government funds sent to the paymaster at Fort Taos, valuable express matter, and an important mail, some of it registered."

"By order of

THE CHIEF."

Ned Nordeck gave a whistle, at hearing this, and then said:

"Let me see thet paper, pard?"

"Pardon me, but I am not allowed to trust it out of my hands; but I read it to you to let you feel you need have no anxiety about being robbed of your valuable freight, as we are here to protect you."

"Them is your men inside?"

"Yes."

"Not miners?"

"No."

"All detectives?"

"Yes."

"Five?"

"Yes; five of them."

"Well, I hope the Cobras won't jump us, for ther fight will be hot, or there won't be any."

"How do you mean?"

"Waal, I means this:

"I has traveled trails a long time, and I mind when I come out of Herders' Ranch, with two on top and eight inside, including me, eleven of us."

"Well, them men was armed all over, and, ter hear them talk, I just hoped ther Cobras would be on hand, for we'd plant a graveyard right whar they tackled us."

"Them men sung big, sung loud, and I began ter feel sorry for ther Cobras."

"At last we come to a place whar' ther Cobras had jumped me afore, and thar' was several green mounds on ther side of ther trail, which nobody can mistake for other than what they is."

"I hed seen ther bodies planted in 'em."

"Waal, all of a sudden, loud and pipin' come a cry ter hold up."

"I was covered with a gun, I seen thet, and so I halted quick."

"Then ther robber, for there were but one in sight, he says thet he has twenty men, and would kill ther horses and riddle ther coach if there was any sign of fight."

"Then ther singing was low ter soft music, for it turned into beggin' and prayin' fer mercy."

"Thet outlaw chief then raade 'em git out, one by one, and lay down."

"Then he picked 'em clean; he tuk every dollar, watch and chain, they hed; and they hed a great deal, fer they was a lot of young fellers goin' ter ther fort ter ther weddin' of a young officer they knew."

"Oh, how they prayed, sandwichin' profanity in with prayer; they begged, promised, and all to no good, for the outlaw got it all."

"Did you lose much?"

"Bless yer, he never bothered me, though I hed a big freight aboard, only ther men who was goin' ter wipe ther Cobras off ther face of ther 'arth."

"He let you go on, then?"

"Yas; told me ter hump along, and I did so, and it were like a funeral procession all ther rest o' ther way, fer them gents was so quiet."

"They all hed weddin' presents fer ther lady and gent who was ter be married, and them was tuk, too, and ther party had come all ther way from New York."

"And they never recovered ther things?"

"Every dollar, and everything else, was waitin' fer 'em at the fort, for ther outlaw chief was Lieutenant McKenny Willis, who hed made bets with brother officers he could hang up ther whole outfit, which he did, and all alone, and won his bets, too, and ther joke nearly kilt them ten fellers," and Ned laughed heartily at the remembrance of the young officer's practical joke upon the tenderfeet wedding guests.

CHAPTER III.

NED NORDECK SURPRISED.

The detective had listened with interest to Ned's story, but then seemed to think that it reflected upon the courage of his men and himself, so said:

"So you think we would surrender, too, if the outlaws held up the coach?"

"Waal, you hasn't been singing loud of what you would do, and, as fightin' is yer trade, I guess you'd do some shootin', but I want ter tell you that, no matter how brave men is, and how many, when they hears ther order of "Hands up, or die!" from ther thicket, or behind a rock, they does jist what they is told, ninety-nine times in a hundred."

"I has driven brave men over this line, I hain't no coward myself, but I has seen them hand over ther valuables, and I has fished in my pockets and got out my little pile, fer a revolver muzzle p'intin' in yer face is a mighty strong argument, and extends a very pressin' invitation fer yer ter come down out of yer tree."

"No, pard, yer is caught in a ambush, and, though men loves ther money, they jist lets it go when it comes to a question of gold or life."

"Then you think sending me along, with my four men as a guard, is a poor protection to the coach?"

"That's what I thinks."

"I am sorry."

"Now, you may be used ter thief-catchin', crook-chasin', and all that, but when it comes ter sendin' tenderfeet out here ter down Cobras, they ain't in it a little bit."

"If you was Buffalo Bill, now, with four scouts, that officer I spoke of, Lieutenant Willis, and a squad of soldiers, come expressly for a fight, ter trap ther trappers, then, when they got ther word, they wouldn't be knocked

silly by scare and surprise, but would pile out and go at it, and ther chances are Mr. Cobra would have ter crawl fer ther nearest hole ter hide in."

The detective laughed, and then the relay was reached, where a change of horses was made.

The men got out, stretched ther legs, and talked with the two stock-tenders, and the trip was resumed.

The detective again returned to the box, and, after going a number of miles, he asked:

"Was there a hold-up anywhere near here?"

"Right on ahead, and yer'll see ther graves I told yer of."

"It was there that Lieutenant Willis, masked and in rough clothes, held up ther weddin' party."

"Don't pass the place without showing me."

"I won't, fer it's ther boss place fer a hold-up."

"Have another cigar."

Ned accepted the invitation, and soon after said:

"Thar is ther place now, and, ef ther Cobras hadn't been scared off ther trail by Buffalo Bill, yer might hev a chance ter find out how bad a hold-up would scare yer, pard."

"Pard Nordeck, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Well, ef I kin, I'll do it."

"Just draw rein a minute."

"Yer wants ter see ther place, does you?" and Ned halted his team.

The stage door flew open upon either side, the four men sprang out, and, as they did so, the man on the box cried:

"The favor I wished to ask is this: I don't wish you to be a fool, for you are a brave man, and I do not wish to harm you; but I am a detective for the Cobras, and have spotted the valuable cargo you carry, and we want it."

The revolver had already looked squarely into the face of Ned Nordeck, and a furtive glance showed him that four other weapons were covering him, and he raised his hands above his head, crying out:

"Oh, Lord, be merciful ter me, a fool!"

The men laughed, and the pleasant fellow, who Ned had thought had been so very entertaining as a listener, said:

"We are five against you, Ned, and there is no chance for you."

"I like you, and I told my men they should not kill you, as was planned, for you were to be shot in the back from the coach window."

"You shall not lose a dollar yourself——"

"Don't say that, for I has a hundred along of my own money, and ther fine watch and chain ther officers at ther fort give me, and ther diamond pin in my scarf that ther boys at ther ranch made me a present of; so take 'em all; take 'em all!" cried Ned.

"But we don't wish to rob you, a poor driver."

"Never mind me! Rob me, or shoot me, take your choice, for, if ther company has ter lose, I don't want ter save mine; so take it all, pard!"

"Well, it might get you into trouble to save your things and lose the company's, so we'll take all."

"You see, the Cobras are not driven off the trail yet by Buffalo Bill."

"I can swear to that fact."

"We let up, for he was crowding us close, killed our captain, and so we lay low for a while."

"But, you see, we gained by it, for we've got a new

captain, and the money and valuables began to go through again, and the Fort Sumner coach will carry a big freight when it pulls out at midnight from Herders' Ranch."

"Lord, and I can't save it!"

"You can't save your own, and you won't get into Fort Taos until night, and, unless you can fly, you will not be able to warn Lem Luby, of the Sumner coach," was the reply of the outlaw.

CHAPTER IV.

LEFT ALONE.

Ned sat watching the plunderers, as they took the money and valuables out of his strong box, and then the mailbag, which they did not open.

All were put into a couple of thick canvas bags, which were strapped together, so that they could be thrown across a saddle.

"You will have to delay here until our men come to meet us, as, if they do not put in an appearance, there being some mistake about the place of meeting us, we will have to take your horses, Ned."

"How in thunder will I get on, then?"

"You will have to foot it, for, if we have to ride from here, we can be easily followed, while our men, if they come, will not ride a horse within a couple of miles of here, and on foot we will not leave a trail."

"But yer won't need six horses."

"Not to ride, but to keep you from riding, yes, for you can't get in to the fort before morning, having to foot it."

"That's so," said Ned.

"It will be late to-morrow afternoon before I can get soldiers back here on your trail."

"Yes."

But Ned did not express aloud his thoughts that there was a relay station twenty miles this side of the fort, and the one he had passed seven miles back on the trail, and, if they took his horses, he could go back there, send word to the ranch, by one of the stock-tenders, and, getting fresh horses for his coach, push right on to the fort, arriving there by midnight, anyhow.

"Are you the chief?" he asked of the leader.

"I am the sub-chief."

"You hain't Cap'n Cobra, then?"

"No; but I'm one of the Snakes."

"What might be yer name, fer I'd like ter know yer more intimate."

"If I gave you my real name, you would have the hounds of the law out here after me for a killing scrape I got into several years ago, so I'll tell you that, in the band, I am known as Rattlesnake Rob, called Rattle for short."

"Well, yer look it."

"Does yer know how much worth yer has got?"

"About forty thousand, in all."

"You is right, and yer'll see thet ther government won't stand no such nonsense, nor ther company, nuther."

"What are they going to do about it?"

"Hang yer!"

"It's catchin' before hangin'."

"I has observed that; but I also hev noticed thet Buffalo Bill made some of yer dig dirt, and maybe he'll be sent for ag'in."

"I hope not."

Ned Nordeck laughed, and then asked:

"Whar is Cap'n Cobra?"

"Here, there, everywhere."

"That means nothing."

"He may be here any minute, he may be in Herders' Ranch now, or at Fort Taos, or Sumner."

"None of us know anything about his movements."

The leader seemed now to be growing impatient, and his anxiety was shared in by Ned Nordeck, who began to fear his horses would be taken.

But, after an hour's delay, and just as the leader had ordered the men to unharness the six horses, one of the outlaws called out:

"There they come!"

Through the timber was seen coming a man wearing a mask, and dressed in the green costume representing a snake's skin.

He was on foot, but he carried a rifle on his shoulder, and came along at a brisk step.

As he approached, he saluted the leader, and said:

"The horses are all ready, sir, if you are."

"We have been here an hour waiting."

"Any word from the chief?"

"Only that I was to have horses at a given point for you, and come on to this place to meet you, and come on foot, to leave no trail."

"So my instructions said."

"Come, men, unharness these horses; unfasten every buckle, and scatter the harness about."

"Then get the wrench and take the nuts off the wheels, and it will give Ned here a couple of hours' work to get ready to start on, and that will allow us ample time."

The orders were carried out, and Ned Nordeck was left standing alone in the trail, viewing his scattered harness and the work left for him to do, while the outlaws disappeared in the timber, carrying their booty with them.

CHAPTER V.

THE MEETING AT THE FORD.

Ned Nordeck was not a profane man, but he admitted that just then he tried a few choice oaths, to see if they would comfort him.

To his surprise, he discovered that they would not rise to the occasion, so he sat down to think over the situation.

But he sat for a moment only, and, springing to his feet, cried:

"I clean forgot Buffalo Bill!

"I'll meet him on ther trail ahead!"

Buffalo Bill, king of scouts, was at Fort Taos at the time, and had recently killed the leader of the Cobras. He was still watching the trails, however, fearing that the band might get together again, under some new leader.

This thought seemed to inspire him, for he quickly picked up the wrench, put the nuts on again, and then began to collect his pieces of harness.

This was no easy task, for every strap had been unbuckled and scattered.

But he got them together at last, put the harness upon his horses, hitched them to the coach, and, springing upon his box, called out:

"Now, go like skeered antelopes!"

Away went the team, and Ned did not spare them.

He held the reins well in hand, kept his whip ready to

touch up any horse that showed a sign of laziness, and cast mile after mile behind him.

At last the descent began toward the river, and he was nearing the ford, when he beheld a horseman riding along the bank and coming down the stream.

He had a horse following him, and, as he rode out of the timber, Ned Nordeck gave a yell that could have been heard a mile, and cracked his whip a dozen times by way of a salute.

"Buffalo Bill! Buffalo Bill!

"I'd rather see yer now than git a fortune!"

"Ah! Ned, I thought you were on a racket when I saw you," said Buffalo Bill, as he halted by the coach.

"Pard Bill, I'm drunk clean through with mad."

"I tell yer, I've been done fer awful."

"You have been robbed by Cobras, who took passage in your coach, and they got a rich haul."

"You knows it all?"

"Yes, I am on a little secret service work."

"That's what ther feller said thet robbed ther coach."

Buffalo Bill laughed, and replied:

"I did hope to get here in time to warn you, as I had information that the Cobras were going to break out again; but it's a long and hard trail I have to travel, so I am too late to prevent the robbery, but may be able to recover the stolen goods."

Then Ned Nordeck told the whole story of the ride from Herders' Ranch, all that the leader of the band of plunderers had told him, of the halt and robbery, the coming of a man who reported horses were in waiting for them a couple of miles away, and how they had scattered his harness and did other things to delay him.

"I will see Lieutenant Willis, as he is at Herders' Ranch, and by daybreak we will have that booty, if it has been taken where I suppose it has."

"If it has not, why, I can circle around the place of hold-up, a couple of miles away, and strike their trail after they reached their horses, and track them."

"Now, Ned, I wish you to tell the colonel the whole situation, and ask him to send to the ford here a sergeant, corporal, and sixteen men from Lieutenant Willis' troop, and Brazos Ben, Dot Driver and twelve other scouts, and start them off as soon as possible, and either Lieutenant Willis or myself will be here to meet them."

"I'll do it, sir; but, now, let me tell you that Lem Luby's coach is going to catch it, too."

"How do you know this?"

"I'll tell yer," and Ned told what the road-agent had said:

"Luby leaves Herders' Ranch at midnight, and he will be held up soon after daybreak. I may be able to head them off."

"Now, I'm off, and you had better push through at good speed," and, remounting his horse, Buffalo Bill crossed the river, and rode hard for a secret camp, in which he hid while watching the trails, while Ned set his team going hard for the fort.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SCOUT LYING IN WAIT.

Buffalo Bill found his horse left in camp looking lonesome, but still, with his long stake line, finding grass in plenty to feed upon, and with the brook near for water.

He hastily cooked his supper and ate it.

"Now I must be off, and Comrade has got to travel, for dark is coming on, and I have got to drop all else now to warn Lem Luby of the intended attack upon him, and it is mighty near a fifty-mile ride from here," he said.

With this, Buffalo Bill turned off of the trail to the right, and began to go across country, taking his own ideas of the way to guide his horse.

He had the points of the compass, the distances from place to place, the lay of the land, and the general directions the stage trails led down fine, so he knew just about where he would strike into the one leading from Herders' Ranch to Fort Sumner.

He well knew that the coach driven by Lem Luby would leave the ranch at midnight, drive along at a good pace until it struck the first relay, and then would reach the hill country and go slow, as the trail would be rugged, and it would be night.

Once in the hill country, and day having dawned, Lem Luby was liable to run upon the Cobras anywhere.

He would not come to another relay to change horses until fifteen miles this side of Fort Sumner, and between the two relay stations the outlaws had been wont to act, the nature of the country protecting them in an escape.

So Buffalo Bill pushed ahead steadily, urging his horse into a canter whenever he could do so, and making the best time he was able.

Midnight came, and found him twenty miles away from the trail.

But he argued that Lem Luby had more than that distance to drive before he reached the spot where he wished to head him off.

Day dawned, and Buffalo Bill was but a few miles from the trail, and Luby was not due for a couple of hours.

So Buffalo Bill halted in a piece of meadowland bordering a brook, unsaddled his horse, and staked him out, and then built a fire to cook his breakfast.

He was perfectly calm, and a confident smile was upon his face.

He was, as he said to himself, "playing to win," and he had the cards well in hand.

He ate a hearty breakfast, put out the fire, lighted his pipe, and leisurely saddled his horse, which was much refreshed by the hour's rest.

Mounting again, the scout pressed on, and in half an hour came out into the stage trail.

He turned in the direction of Herders' Ranch, and, riding a short distance, halted there.

Then he set to work, after staking his horse out, to get a disguise he carried, which made him resemble one of the outlaws, ready to put on, should there be any one on the coach box with Lem Luby.

Over half an hour he waited, and then came the rumbling of wheels, and he muttered:

"The coach is coming."

Anxious that Lem Luby should not mistake him for a road-agent, Buffalo Bill stood out in the trail, where he could see him, and waited for the coach to come in sight.

Soon it did so, driving at a slow pace, and a glance at the trail ahead revealed the form of the scout to Lem Luby, who at once came to a halt.

Taking off his sombrero, Buffalo Bill waved it, and beckoned Lem Luby on, for he saw that the driver did not recognize him at first glance.

But Lem quickly saw that the one who barred his way was the scout, and he gave a yell of delight, and drove on.

As he came to a halt, he was about to give another yell, when Buffalo Bill put his finger upon his lips, and the driver at once said, in a whisper:

"What are it, pard Buffalo Bill?"

"Trouble."

"Enough said."

"I thought you was a Cobra—don't shoot me—when I seen yer in ther trail, but when yer played yer cards I knew yer, and my heart dropped back where it lives, for it were crowdin' my tongue out between my teeth."

"I don't wonder that you were alarmed, Lem, for you have a very valuable freight aboard."

"You knows ther game, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, I declare."

"And so do the Cobras."

"Oh, Lord! I've played the wrong card!"

"Not yet, for I rode all night to head you off, to save the freight."

"Pard, you is a trump!"

"Ned Nordeck was held up yesterday, and robbed of a most valuable mail, express, and his money box."

"My! my!"

"The gang played miners, bound for Santa Fe, and rode through with him."

"Lieutenant Willis is on the trail, and will have scouts and soldiers ready by to-morrow to strike, for the Cobras are at their old game again."

"And playin' to win?"

"Yes."

"What shall I do?"

"I came to help you out."

"Jist so, and I bless you, Pard Cody."

"You have a very valuable cargo, so my idea is that you let me hold you up and take it all from you."

"You bet!"

"I will take it, or send it by my men, into Herders' Ranch, and on your way back you can bring an officer and soldiers to carry it to the fort, under escort."

"You are playin' yer trumps now, pard."

"The Cobras will certainly catch you on ahead, and you can paralyze them by simply saying you were held up back on the trail by outlaws and robbed."

"We will make tracks here, and every sign of a halt and pillage of the coach, to show that you are telling the truth; in fact, will smash your strong box, and leave it here, for I will have to take the things in my saddle-bags."

"If they wish to prove what you say, these signs will do it, and you might say that you saw one man on horseback—myself, you know—and two on foot, you and I, for it will not be lying."

"Pard Cody, don't you worry about my lying, for I can do it when there is a reason. Why, I has had blisters on my tongue for weeks from dodgin' ther truth."

"All right. I am glad your conscience will not cause you to suffer to any great extent."

"Now, let us get to work."

"Ther cards is shuffled, cut, and ther play begins," said Lem Luby, who, as an inveterate gambler when off duty, always "spoke by the cards" when he had anything to say.

The freight was a valuable one, even more so than had been that carried by Ned Nordeck.

But Buffalo Bill packed it all away upon his horse, and the signs to indicate a robbery were scattered about.

"Now, Lem, tell the colonel just what I did, and that I turned road-agent from necessity to save your freight.

"Tell him if I cannot get the booty into Herders' Ranch on time, I will hide it, and send a letter to Jack Tobin for you, so the officer sent as an escort can find it."

"I'll tell him, sir."

"Now, drive at a slow pace, and look like a very wretched man, as you sit upon your box, as though you did not care whether you lived or died."

"I can look it; I used ter put that look on when my mother-in-law was around, for she drove me to drink; and, to reform, I took to the trail and drove a coach.

"I'll wear my too-much-mother-in-law expression."

"Then you'll make the Cobras weep," said Buffalo Bill, as Lem gave him an example of how he intended to look.

"Maybe it will drive them ter throw up ther cards o' sin and play ther game o' salvation."

"They will—when they die; not before.

"But my idea is, you'll be held up about five miles from here, and, if you delay all you can, it will give me over two hours' start of them, and that will be enough, for maybe, if they follow me, they will run upon a snag they are not looking for, if I can get to the lieutenant and his men.

"Good-by, Lem, and I hope the loss of the booty will not get you into trouble."

"I hopes not; but I'll take what comes, no matter how the game goes, if I can only save the jackpot," and Lem Luby, a rough diamond hero, drove on his way, as Buffalo Bill mounted and rode off through the timber.

CHAPTER VII.

A WISE PRECAUTION.

Lem Luby drove on his way, playing his part well.

His team went along, with loose reins, and the driver looked like one who had lost his pocketbook and best friend.

One door of the coach was open, the cushions were off the seats, the boxes beneath were open, and the rear boot was unstrapped.

The whole appearance of the driver and his coach was one of demoralization.

Thus Lem continued for several miles, and he then, in spite of his apparent dejection, began to cast anxious looks ahead of him.

He knew his danger if the Cobras suspected he had outwitted them on purpose.

They were liable to put a bullet through his brain, and leave him dead in the trail, the coach standing near without a team.

No one knew better just what the Cobras were and would do than Lem Luby.

So he kept his eyes well abroad, and at last muttered: "Well, I'd like ter pass in ther game ef I were able, but if I can't I'll play my hand. I told yer so!"

It was himself whom Lem Luby had "told so," for this last remark was occasioned by suddenly seeing a masked man step out into the trail ahead of him and level a rifle full at him.

Others appeared, also, as if by magic, upon each side of the trail, until Lem saw that there were seven of them.

They were all masked, and dressed in the garb of the Cobras, representing the skin of a snake, and with stuffed serpent skins as hat-bands.

There was no need to utter the command of "Halt! and hands up!"

That rifle leveled at his heart spoke volumes, and Lem drew rein by calling to his horses and putting his foot hard upon the brake, while he called out:

"What! Has I got ter be robbed ag'in?"

"Yes, Lem Luby, as long as you carry booty, and the Cobras need pocket change, you will have to be robbed," said the leader, stepping forward.

"Then, yer ought ter go in cahoots, fer t'other gang got all I has."

"What do you mean?" asked the leader, sharply.

"Jist what I says, for all I hed was in ther jackpot t'others got."

"What others?"

"Them that ordered me up back on ther trail."

"Where?"

"Some five miles back."

"When?"

"A leetle over a hour ago, for I has felt so bad since I hev let ther team play ther hand they wanted to, and poke along same as a funeral outfit."

"Lem Luby, are you telling me the truth?" and the outlaws had all crowded around, now greatly excited.

"I c'u'dn't lie, ef I tried ter; but it hain't no lie—I only wish it was."

"Your coach has been robbed?"

"Yes, and yer pards got a big haul."

"Our pards?"

"Yas, for they was rigged out same as you is."

"And they held you up and robbed you?"

"You bet; they played trumps, and took my pile."

"How many?"

"I seen three of 'em only, but them was enough."

"One was on horseback, and thar was two afoot, and they swept ther coach of chips."

"I believe you are lying."

"I feels downright hurt you should suspect me."

"I shall search you and your old hearse."

"You is welcome, for they cleaned my chips out along with ther balance."

"What did you have?"

"A big roll of money for the paymaster, another for the post trader, some express packages of value, and some registered mail."

"Them is right; but I can hardly believe your story."

"It's a pity, because you is a liar, and cheats in ther game, yer suspects me."

The leader made no reply to this, but called his men apart, and they talked earnestly together for a while.

Then he returned, and three of the Cobras began to search the coach, and Lem Luby, as well.

The search was a fruitless one, as the reader knows.

Then the leader said:

"See here, Lem Luby."

"Well?"

"We are going to return to the spot where you say you were robbed."

"Yer can go, an' bad luck with you," was the emphatic reply.

"But you go back, too."

"See here, Pard Thief, I thinks I has suffered enough without being turned back on ther trail; besides, it's bad luck ter turn back."

"You have had your bad luck."

"I could have more."

"How so?"

"I wasn't called upon ter pass in my chips and tarn my bloomin' toes up to ther daisies."

"You will be, if we don't find it as you have said."

"What does yer mean?"

"I mean that you go with us back on the trail; and, if there is not the proof we seek of what you say, we will kill you, and leave you in your old hearse."

"God bless Buffalo Bill, fer ef he hadn't put ther signs thar, I'd hev tuk ther glory trail," muttered Lem Luby, with a heart full of thankfulness for the scout's thoughtfulness in manufacturing proof of the hold-up.

Lem Luby put back over the trail with evident reluctance.

But there was nothing else for him to do than obey.

The outlaws went into the timber, mounted their horses, and rode back with the coach, some ahead, some following behind it.

Lem saw that there were just seven of them.

He drove rapidly, for he knew he would be some four or five hours late in getting to Fort Sumner as it was.

He saw that the outlaws were very much disturbed by what he had told them.

They did not understand who the other band of road-agents could be.

Lem Luby enjoyed their anxiety immensely, and called out to the leader:

"Don't yer know who it is thet got my booty, pard Cobra?"

"Oh, yes, we know."

"You is lyin' now, sartin, for yer looks as melancholy as a corpse at a buryin'."

"I tell you that I know!"

"And I says yer don't fer yer is skeered ter death; but somebody got it, and I tell yer thet I thinks yer all has been fooled by some o' yer gang."

"Maybe it war' ther chief, fer he were a fine-looking feller thet held me up."

"You said he was masked."

"I says so now; but he were tall, and too fine a gent ter be in the road-agent trade, I tuk it."

"There were three, you said."

"I seen three of 'em."

"If I'd 'a' know'd there wasn't more, I'd hev made a break for it."

"And gotten your head shot off."

"I'm right good myself in playin' trumps, when ther playin' cards is shootin' irons."

"Oh, we know that, Lem Luby."

"You are a plucky fellow, a good fellow, a dead shot and take big chances in doing your duty, and it is just these virtues you possess that have saved your life scores of times."

"But, though those men who held you up were Cobras, beyond a doubt, I cannot just place them, for you know that Buffalo Bill came down here and hunted us hard."

"You hain't the King o' Clubs, then?"

"No; I'm a sub-officer."

"I thought maybe, you was so perlite and such a nice

looker, you might be ther Ace thet wins ther game, fer I hears thet Captain Cobra, your new chief, are a remarkable man."

The outlaw leader was riding alongside of the coach now, and he seemed much pleased with the flattery, for he said:

"Many mistake me for the chief, but I am only second in command."

Lem Luby laughed, and replied, in his fearless way:

"Wal, it's a wonder yer ever got thet high, unless yer kin cut a throat better than any one else, for I was only jokin' when I called yer a gent, and said yer looked like ther chief, just givin' yer a leetle sweetenin' afore a bitter dose, for I does regard yer as a very hon'ry specimen o' a man, the worst card in ther deck."

"Look like ther chief?"

"Ho, ho, ho! Why, yer is thet bow-legged yer couldn't head a sow and pig off in a lane, and they'd hev ter put bay winders inter yer coffin for ther spreadin' out of yer legs. He, he, he!"

The enraged outlaw gave a look up at Lem, to warn him to desist, and dropped his hand upon his revolver.

But Lem was mad clean through at being turned back; he had gotten reckless, and he always jeered the outlaws and defied them, so he continued:

"Look like ther king snake o' ther nest, indeed!"

"Why, yer wears yer mask ter keep yer face from frightenin' yer horse, for, if he seen it, he'd kick his shoes off tryin' ter hit yer with 'em. He, he, he!"

The man grasped his revolver, suddenly threw it to a level, and pulled the trigger.

Lem Luby coolly reined his horses back at the shot, and said, without the least show of emotion:

"Yer is a blamed bad shot, fer, though thet bullet went through my hat brim, it missed my nose four inches."

One of the outlaws quickly said something to the leader, in a low tone, and he returned his revolver to his belt, and glanced around upon his men, all of whom had collected about the coach to hear Lem Luby's opinion of the outlaw.

The leader relapsed into silence now, while Lem drove on at a more lively pace, eying, however, whenever he saw the opportunity, the crowd of Cobras, who rode too near his coach wheels, and once unhorsing one, though not hurting him much, for there was no more reckless man on the frontier than was Lem Luby when he got into one of his ugly humors.

"There's ther place I war held up, so make what yer kin out of it," he cried, as they drew up at the spot where Buffalo Bill had left the "signs" of the pretended robbery.

The outlaws sprang from their horses.

They saw the strong box, broken open, and the leader said:

"He has told the truth, for here is the proof."

Luby heard just what was said, and called out:

"I suppose I kin go now, Snakes?"

"Go!"

Lem waited to hear no more, but turned his coach about, and started off at a brisk pace, but, glancing back ere he had gone very far, he uttered a startled exclamation, for he saw a horseman approaching the Cobras.

"If it ain't Buffalo Bill playin' a lone hand, as Viper,

hope I may die; but I can't help him, for I don't dare stop, as it might give ther racket away.

"Oh, Pard Bill, let ther angels up yonder perpect yer now, fer them devils holds a full hand ag'in yer!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S BOLD VENTURE.

When Buffalo Bill rode away from the spot where he had played such a clever game with Lem Luby, to save his freight from the outlaws, he went a few miles back in the direction he had come.

The disguise that Buffalo Bill carried was one that he had secured from one of the Cobras he had met and killed.

This was a new man, known as Viper, who had been sent on an errand by the chief, and had met the scout and been killed by him.

A note he carried showed that he was a new man, and it served to introduce him to the other members of the band, and Buffalo Bill hoped to pass himself off as Viper, with very little difficulty.

So he dismounted, and began to carefully make his toilet.

He had his comb and brush with him, his razor, a small mirror, and the effects taken from Viper, along with the disguises.

Among his own effects there was a wig that had been pawned by a bald-headed man for a bar bill, and the hair was iron-gray.

This the scout put on, after he had snugly packed his long hair close to his head.

The Mexican suit of the Cobra and the sombrero added to the disguise, while, having cut off his imperial, and taken his mustache down from curling upward at the ends, by the aid of soap, he was a very much disguised man from the handsome, dashing, debonair Buffalo Bill.

Then he blotched his face with some iodine he had in his holster medicine chest, and assumed a totally different expression from that natural to him.

Satisfied with his make-up, he mounted his horse, and began to look about for a hiding place for the booty he carried.

He was not long in finding the very place, a crevice between two rocks, where all was black below.

Letting the bags down with his lariat, he found a resting place for the booty, and, cutting a vine, he bound it in the crevice, thus hiding the line which held the bag.

Then he set off for a cliff cavern, where he knew the Cobras sometimes hid, and was not long in reaching there.

It did not take him long to discover that there was a fresh trail there, doubtless made at early dawn, as the outlaws had pushed through after robbing Ned Nordeck.

There were the tracks of seven horses, which would account for the five Cobras who had been passengers in the coach with Driver Nordeck, and the man who had come to the scene of the hold-up on foot to meet them, with one horse to spare.

The tracks showed that the men had not been very long at the cliff, but had gone off in a direction toward the Fort Sumner stage trail.

Buffalo Bill dismounted, and approached the entrance to the retreat, cautiously.

Having been there once before, and seen the secret en-

trance, he knew well how to gain admission, by means of the trunk of a large tree, which had been hollowed out, and, brought to the spot, had been placed over a hole in the ground, and fastened there.

The trunk stood in a thicket, which no one would enter without some good reason, and about the height of the scout's head there was a swinging door cut into the tree, which he opened.

Reaching his hand inside, he drew out a short ladder, which enabled him to step up and enter the opening, and, drawing it in after him, to descend to the ground within, where there was a hole in the rock.

The props which held the old hollow tree trunk in place furnished a ladder for the descent into a large cave, which opened out into the solid face of the cliff.

Not a soul was within this cavern, as Buffalo Bill could see, but, that it was a secret retreat of a band of hunted men, there was undoubted evidence about him.

Rifles, revolvers, and knives hung here and there, and rolls of bedding were scattered about, with cooking utensils, lariats, several lanterns, and a lot of provisions.

There had been a fireplace made of rocks near the opening, and a chimney, from which a stovepipe could be thrust out some feet from the cliff when a fire was needed.

But there was no trace of the treasure he sought, though that the outlaws had been there he had every evidence, for a few embers still burned in the fireplace.

Suddenly the scout said:

"They have a secret hiding place here I know, but how to find it is the question.

"Ah, I have it! They are far from here now, doubtless, but those who are to hold up Ned Nordeck must know, and I will find them, for this disguise and the letter I got from the outlaw I killed will pass me.

"Anyhow, I'll chance it," and he left the cavern and started back for the stage trail, to come upon the seven outlaws just as Lem Luby was driving away.

The outlaws started as they saw Buffalo Bill coming through the timber, and were on their guard at once.

But they beheld no one else, and, as he came leisurely along toward them, he saw that they were masked, so he took a mask from his pocket and held it before his face, as a means of showing that he was one of them.

Not one of the seven men now grouped together, with arms in their hands, recalled what one of their band the horseman could be, and yet they felt sure there was no mistake; he must be a Cobra.

"Ah! He is one of the men who robbed the coach, and was acting under orders from the chief."

Thus said the leader, and this seemed to be the accepted opinion of all.

Another minute Buffalo Bill had ridden up to the group, and he boldly lowered his mask, and asked:

"Is this Rattle's band of men?"

"No; I am Moccasin, and it is my band. Who are you?"

"I am Viper, a new man, and a messenger from Captain Cobra, but I was to seek Rattle, who had orders to hold up the Taos coach."

"Did he do so?"

"Yes, but I was late, so missed him, and took the trail on this way to the secret cavern, but found that it had been there and gone, and, knowing that you were to attack the Sumner coach, I came on here, thinking Rattle

had joined you. Here is my letter to Rattle, if you read Spanish."

The man who had led the outlaws, and called himself Moccasin, took the note and read it, while he said:

"I am half-Mexican, half-American, so speak Spanish as I do English. So you missed Rattle?"

"Yes."

Then Buffalo Bill recalled what Ned Nordeck had told him about the outlaw having said an attack was also to be made upon Lem Luby's coach, and he continued:

"As I shall now go back to tell the chief that Rattle made his haul all right, what shall I tell him from you?"

"I am sorry I cannot send good news; but, the truth is, the coach was held up before it reached us."

"Three men did it, but who they were we have no idea, and I now begin to fear that they were either traitor Cobras or not of our band."

"Did the captain say anything to you about a third party being out?"

"No; he only ordered you and Rattle to act."

"Then those who robbed the coach were, evidently, not of the Cobra band."

"Can you not trail them from here?" asked Buffalo Bill, innocently, recalling how well he had covered up the tracks of his horse a short distance away.

"Yes, for they must have all been mounted, though the driver of the coach told me there was only one that he saw on horseback."

"And they got all the booty?"

"Every peso."

"What shall I tell the captain?"

"When do you go back?"

"Right away, unless your retreat is near, so I could go there to rest and get a meal."

"Our retreat is thirty miles from here."

"I am a new man, you know, so am not aware of the retreats."

"I am an old friend of the captain, and, meeting me, he took me in with him, so I am to ride as messenger."

"How will I find you, if he sends me to you?"

"The captain knew of a new retreat, and sent us there, after calling us together again, for, you know, Buffalo Bill raided our old stronghold."

"Yes, I know."

"The old retreat is a dandy, too, and we are to all stay there to await orders by messenger what to do."

"I won't attempt to go there now; but aren't you afraid of being tracked there by the scouts and soldiers?"

"No, indeed, for we follow the well-beaten trail to the river, and then it is a wade and swim alternately for five miles, and we come out where no soldiers or scouts would suspect, or be able to track us."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCOUT AND THE OUTLAW OFFICER.

"What shall I tell the captain?" asked Buffalo Bill, anxious to no longer delay his departure, as he saw there was no chance of getting to the retreat, and thus learning the way there.

"Tell him I shall at once take the trail of the men who robbed the coach, and try to track them down and regain the booty."

"If successful in rescuing what was taken, I shall place

it in the secret hiding place of the cliff cavern, and then go to the retreat in the mountains."

"If not successful, I shall also go there, with my men, to await further orders from him."

"I'll tell him; but I guess you'll find it hard work to find these robbers."

"I am afraid that I will, but I will soon know."

"You are sure that Rattle's band got their booty?"

"They must have done so, for I came to the tracks where the coach had been held up, and their trail led to the secret retreat on the cliff, which Captain Cobra told me how to find."

"Not the trail of all."

"Oh, no; the trail of one horse led there."

"I thought it strange, for only the officers and messengers know of that retreat."

"But, if the trail led them there, the booty was left there."

"I am sorry I did not see Rattle, for I had orders to look over the booty, and take Captain Cobra a complete list of all that was there."

"See here; come with us to see what we can do in tracking those robbers, and then we'll camp for dinner, and you can get rest and food."

"Then I'll start the men to the retreat, and go to the cliff cavern with you, for I know the secret hiding place, and you can make out the list."

"I'll do it."

The men were at once set to work picking up the trail of the "three robbers" Lem Luby had reported, and, after a very close search, found only the trail of Buffalo Bill's horse.

This they followed for a mile or more, to suddenly lose it on soil that left no trace of a track.

The disguised scout, playing the part of the outlaw, Viper, to perfection, helped diligently in the search, smiling within himself as he thought of how he could tell them a secret of how he had ridden across that hard, rocky soil to a brook, entered it, then, with "mufflers," which he never went without, had covered the hoofs of his horse, turned him right back out of the brook, and, riding again over the trackless soil, had gone on his way, leaving no trace of a trail.

Having searched in vain for the trail, Moccasin ordered his men into camp, and they were soon busy getting dinner.

The meal over, horses were saddled up, and the men were told to take the trail to the retreat.

"Ride slow, men, for I will try and overtake you, but do not be surprised if I do not, for I may take a notion to go with Viper here and see the captain, so as to clear our skirts for not having gotten that booty."

With this, the men rode away toward the northward, evidently greatly chagrined at their failure to get the booty Lem Luby had carried on his coach, but glad, at least, that Rattle and his band had gotten that which was on the way to Taos.

Side by side, Buffalo Bill and Moccasin rode, and the former drew a long breath of relief when he felt that he had only one man to deal with instead of seven.

In half an hour they had reached the spot, near the secret retreat, where the horses were left, and Buffalo Bill, to lull any suspicion, at once led the way, opened the door in the hollow tree, took out the ladder, and entered.

But Buffalo Bill was very watchful of the man, who had begun to appear a trifle nervous.

He was a large, athletic fellow, and looked like a very Hercules, while his movements were quick and decided.

Entering the cavern, the man said:

"So the captain did not tell you how to find the booty?"

"No, for he expected Rattle, who knows the secret, would be with me."

"True. Now, see here!"

They had approached the entrance to the cavern that looked out of the cliff.

It was a splendid view they got there of the country beyond for miles, the river dashing along far below at the base of the cliff, a perfect window, as it were, in the rocky wall.

CHAPTER X.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

The outlaw stood a moment looking out of the opening in the cliff, as though admiring the view, and then said:

"So you don't know how to find the secret hiding place?"

"No."

"Well, it is a good secret, as you will see. It is not in the cavern."

"Where is it?"

"I'll show you."

He stepped back to the dark corner, down which the shaft came from above, and brought back with him a stout sapling, with hewn sides, some fifteen feet in length.

Returning to the corner, he brought another of the same size, and laid both of them with one end pointing out of the cavern opening.

Then he shoved them close against the rocks on either side, the one on the left fitting closely in a niche in the rocky doorway.

Each end extended about three feet out of the opening, and the other ends were then propped hard down by poles put upon them and fitting hard against the ceiling of the cavern.

Buffalo Bill watched the man's movements carefully, and the outlaw worked with a look on his face, for he was unmasked now, as though he delighted in surprising Captain Cobra's new man.

Returning again to the dark corner, the outlaw came back bearing a wide board, or plank.

It was very heavy, for it was twenty feet in length, and the scout aided the outlaw in placing it in position.

This position was in shoving one end out of the opening, resting upon one beam and catching the other under the beam on the left.

This held it in position, one end running out along the face of the cliff for some fifteen feet.

But the outlaw was not yet satisfied, but fastened the end under the prop securely to it with a lariat.

"One has to have a cool head to rig this platform and go out upon it. How is your head?"

"All right."

"I am glad, for I would have to bring you all the booty to see. Do you know there are but two of us in the band now who know this secret?"

Stepping out upon the broad, thick planking, the outlaw said:

"Come, for it will hold half a dozen."

The scout followed, unflinchingly, and stood gazing down from the dizzy height at the roaring river beneath him.

The cliff shelved under from the top, and, as he followed the outlaw along the dizzy walk, Buffalo Bill saw that there was a slight curve in the rock some six feet from the entrance to the cavern, and the plank was resting against this. Around this curve half a dozen feet he beheld a hole in the rock.

It was some five feet square, and the bottom of it was nearly on a level with the plank.

From the entrance of the cavern, any one looking out could not have seen it, on account of the curve in the rock.

To hide it from any one looking up from the plain across the river below, a piece of canvas, a curtain, painted the color of the rock, had been hung, and was securely tied at the bottom.

"The chief found this cave by accident.

"He saw it while riding on the plain one day, and some time after, when on the cliff, beheld the hole in the rock.

"Tying his lasso to a tree, he went down it, and found this retreat, so made use of it.

"Lowering himself over with a lariat one day, to find a break in the rock where he could hide treasure, he saw this hole, which is a small cave, as you see, half a dozen feet deep only. See?"

He had unfastened the canvas curtain as he spoke, drew it up, and revealed the little cave filled with booty.

The scout gazed with interest, for he saw there more than the bags which had been taken from Ned Nordeck.

There were rifles and revolvers, fine Mexican saddles studded with silver; fine silk serapes, and a locked box, iron bound, evidently containing valuables.

But, best of all, there were Ned Nordeck's mailbags, and what else had been taken from his coach.

Looking over them in a casual way, Buffalo Bill took a list, and said:

"I am ready to go now."

"All right; we will have to take down the platform, for the chief never leaves that up; in fact, never allows it to be put up in the daytime; but we will soon have it down."

CHAPTER XI.

A SUSPICION VERIFIED.

Buffalo Bill returned to the cavern from his dizzy position, taking good care to keep a sly watch upon the outlaw, to see that he did not slip anything into his pocket of value.

The two set to work to remove the platform, the scout aiding, and noting just how it was done.

Then the two left the place, Buffalo Bill going up last, for he was getting more and more suspicious of the outlaw.

As the latter closed the door behind him, and followed Buffalo Bill toward the horses, he said:

"Well, I must be off, and report to the chief, and I'll have him understand fully that you were in position and ready, and held up the coach, but the work had already been done, doubtless by this man Lem Nichols you spoke of."

"Yes, for I do not wish the chief to blame me."

"You are going right on to the retreat, I suppose?"

"Yes; I'll overtake my men before night, or at their camp."

"As I am a new man, I wish you'd be good enough to give me an idea of how you get to the retreat."

"You leave the trail at the river, you say?"

"Yes, and go down stream."

"The river is not deep, you know, except in places, but you can watch where the shoals are, and follow them, keeping toward the right bank."

"At times you will have to swim your horse from one shoal to another."

"After passing some red cliffs, five miles below the trail crossing, you will see, on the right bank, three pines growing on a point."

"But swim your horse right for those pines, for there is a break in the rock bank right beneath where you can land, and a split in the cliff, which you can enter and ride up to the top, or, rather, lead your horse, for it is a rough climb."

"Once on the top, you can follow the trail to the retreat, which is in Canyon Mountain."

"Thank you, for that is explicit."

"But, I forgot to tell you, there are rubber pants the chief had made, to draw over your clothes, and they are thoroughly waterproof, coming up to your waist."

"You will find them in the point of rocks, just below the ford, before the water grows deep."

"You are very kind. Good-by."

The scout shook hands with the outlaw, and they parted, Buffalo Bill riding away in the direction of the Taos trail, the other toward the new stronghold of the Cobras.

But Buffalo Bill did not go far before coming to a halt.

"I feel that that fellow is going to loot the cave, and, as I intend to do the same, though from a different purpose, I will watch him."

"I'll go back."

With this, he dismounted, unsaddled his horse, staked his mount, for he wished to give him all the rest he could, and started back on foot.

As he neared the cliff, he gave a low chuckle, for his suspicions against the outlaw were verified.

The horse of the Cobra was hitched close up to the cliff, and the rider had already entered the cavern.

Buffalo Bill leaned his rifle against the hollow tree, for the ladder was outside, the bark door swinging open.

Unbuckling his belt of weapons, he took out his bowie-knife and one revolver, thrusting the former in his breeches waistband, ready for use.

Then he threw off his coat and hat, and got ready for a desperate struggle, if it must come to a fight for life.

Buffalo Bill then stepped into the hollow tree, and slowly began to descend, having softly closed the shutter behind him, to leave all dark at the bottom of the shaft.

As a breeze was blowing, the man would, doubtless, think the door had blown to.

Down the shaft, step by step, the scout went, and, reaching the bottom, he turned, revolver in hand.

Buffalo Bill stood in the shaft, watching and waiting.

Soon the outlaw appeared in the opening, his arms full.

He stepped into the cavern, and, taking up a large pair of thick canvas saddle-bags, evidently made for a

pack-horse and to carry booty, began to put the different valuable articles in them.

He took great care in packing them away.

But Buffalo Bill made no move to interfere.

The robber returned to the staging and disappeared.

Soon he came back with another armful of booty.

This, too, was packed away more carefully.

A third trip was made, and still more booty was put into the saddle-bags.

But still the outlaw went again.

Returning, he had several repeating rifles in his arms, and half a dozen belts of arms, revolvers, and bowie knives.

"I'll ask him to hold up."

With this Buffalo Bill stepped out into the cavern, walked quickly to the front of the cavern, and stood just across the canvas saddle-bags.

He had thrown off his wig, his long hair had fallen down, and one who had ever seen him before would now not fail to recognize Buffalo Bill.

A moment more, and he heard a step on the staging, and the man appeared in sight, with one of the fine bridles swung over his arm, and a splendid Mexican saddle held in his hands in front of him.

He intended to make an exchange of his own outfit for those he carried, and get all he could.

But as he came in front of the entrance his eyes fell upon the tall form of the scout filling the cave, and with a revolver covering him, while he heard the words:

"Hands up!"

The shock was a terrible one, the despair of failure and death filling the place of triumph and joy.

He dropped the saddle upon the staging and sprang backward for the shelter of the cliff, but he missed his footing, a wild shriek of terror and despair broke from his lips, a shriek that echoed in Buffalo Bill's ears for many a long day, and he fell from the dizzy height and plunged downward to the surging torrent below.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO HORSEMEN.

Buffalo Bill, with all his nerve, received a severe shock when he saw the man go backward off of the staging.

He realized that the sudden surprise, the destruction of all his hopes, at beholding him barring his way, had caused the man to momentarily lose his nerve, and, weakening, he had thus fallen.

Springing into the entrance of the cavern, the scout leaned over and looked downward, just as the body struck the water with a loud report.

For fully a minute the scout stood looking from the cavern, and then muttered:

"A frightful death, but preferable to hanging, I should say."

"Now to get away from here, for I do not care to go through more to-day than has already fallen to my lot."

He stepped out upon the platform, glanced into the little cavity in the rock, and took note of what remained, putting the saddle and bridle back again, for miraculously they had caught on the plank when the outlaw dropped them.

Tying the canvas covering in place again, the scout re-entered the cavern, drew the large canvas saddle-bags,

full of booty, back from the entrance, and then set to work to remove the platform from along the face of the cliff.

He closed the door in the tree behind him, leaving all as he had found it, and putting the saddle-bags over his shoulders, he walked toward the outlaw's horse.

It did not take him long to mount and ride away from the cliff retreat, taking the direction where he had left his horse.

Reaching the spot, he saddled up, and then transferred the saddle-bags to the animal he had ridden there, leading him by the reins instead of the stake rope.

His way now lay in the direction of the rock where he had hidden the treasure he had taken from Luby's coach.

This was found without difficulty, drawn up and tied securely upon the pack animal.

It was growing late now, and Buffalo Bill knew that night would overtake him before he got far on his way.

Then he considered that Ned Nordeck had reached the fort by midnight, anyhow, barring accidents, of the night before, and the party of scouts and soldiers had been sent out by Colonel Kane by daylight at least.

This being done, they would go to his secret camp, as the rendezvous he had appointed to join them, and if he could reach there by the next morning, they would only have to await his coming one night.

He knew Lieutenant Willis well enough to know that if he delayed much longer in reaching the camp, after what he had heard through driver Nordeck, of his intention to go across to the Fort Sumner trail to warn Lem Luby of his danger, the officer would fear that harm had befallen him, and at once seek to follow his trail to find out.

So Buffalo Bill pushed on his way, halting near sunset in a little valley where there was a stream of water and good pasturage.

Anxious to prepare his horses for the long, hard ride before them, he stripped them of their saddles and bridles to give them complete rest.

Then he set about gathering wood to cook for himself a good supper, anxious to make up by eating what he had lost in sleeping.

The sun was just on the horizon when he saw his horse raise its head quickly and give a low neigh.

Instantly the pipe he was smoking after his supper was cast aside, and he was on the alert for a foe.

Then there rode into sight, two horsemen, and, to his surprise, they approached his camp with their hands raised above their heads as a token of a peaceful mission.

"Cobras, I'll wager high on it, and playing a trick game," muttered the scout, as he stood on guard, watching their approach.

Regarding the two men very closely, Buffalo Bill stood ready for their coming.

"They may be gold prospectors, but I guess they are prospecting in men's pockets.

"I've got too big a pocket just now to take any risk," the scout said.

A moment after, as the two horsemen came further into view, Buffalo Bill gave a low whistle.

Then he murmured, in a measured way:

"That surely looks like a case of resurrection, though I never knew the grave to give up its dead before.

"Yes, it is the outlaw Sol Nichols, whom I thought was dead long ago.

"It is like an apparition from the grave, but I'm not taking chances even with ghosts just now."

The two horsemen had approached very near now, and Buffalo Bill fully recognized the man whom he had seen gambling with Taylor Travis one night at Herders' Ranch and cheating him, and playing with money which Lieutenant Balfour, of Fort Sumner, knew had been taken from Captain Baring, and who was then on his track.

In the arrest following the recognition, one of the men present among those taking sides with the accused man, had been killed by Buffalo Bill, and his other companions had thereupon made themselves scarce.

Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Balfour had found upon the accused man, Sol Nichols, the money and other things taken from Captain Baring, and in taking the prisoner to the fort by Lem Luby's coach, the Cobras had rescued him.

But the rescue had been not to save the man, but to execute him, for, by the laws of the band, he had forfeited his life for having, with a few followers, tried to take the results of the robbery for themselves.

Sentenced to death, one of the three guilty men had fallen, to later slip away, for the one who had pulled trigger on him had not aimed to kill.

The brother of Sol Nichols, Lem Nichols by name, had also vowed vengeance.

Now the scout saw the two approaching, and though he had never seen Lem Nichols, he could readily guess who he was from his resemblance to Sol Nichols, whom he did know, but had supposed was dead.

The brothers were twins, and strongly alike in face and form, and as they came up Buffalo Bill knew whom he had to deal with, and that Sol Nichols had in some way escaped the death to which he had been sentenced.

They were Cobras now, he knew, and desperate men.

Sol Nichols had a grudge to settle with him for aiding Lieutenant Balfour to arrest him, and they had come there for a purpose.

As aides in hunting down the outlaws he no longer needed them, but he would go slow, find out their game, and see if he could not trump every card the two played against him.

Always refraining from taking human life unless driven to it, though he knew that there must be trouble following their coming, he would not take the slightest advantage, as they came with a show of peace.

But such show he knew well meant treachery upon their part, unless they had more to gain by being true.

Buffalo Bill had cast aside his disguise.

There was no further use for it that he could see, so he had bundled it all up together and tied it upon the pack-horse, resuming his own dress, and looking like his old self, save for the sacrificed imperial.

As the men came nearer to his camp, he knew that Sol Nichols must have recognized him.

Perhaps they had been watching him, and had thus laid their plan of action.

There were his horse and the outlaw officer's feeding near.

So thus he stood to face the two brothers, one of whom certainly appeared like an apparition from the grave.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PAIR OF LIARS.

The two men halted about twenty feet from where the scout stood.

They still held their hands up, and had assumed a most ludicrously innocent look to try and appear honest.

"Well, pards, what is it?"

"Yer is Buffalo Bill?"

"I go by that name."

"We know'd it."

"Yes, and you are Sol Nichols, and the other is a brother, I take it, unless all signs fail."

"Yer has it—we is brothers."

"And you are Sol and Lem Nichols, one of whom I have met, and both of whom I know as members of El Cobra's band."

"You is off ther trail, pard."

"Don't lie to me, Sol Nichols, for I arrested you in Herders' Ranch when Lieutenant Balfour pointed you out as the intended slayer of Captain Baring, as the one who had killed the driver of the coach, and who had the property he had stolen on him."

"I admits it all, pard, but you said we is Cobras, and I says no, for we was, but ain't now."

"Ah! you have reformed, eh?"

"Jest so."

"Your close call from death scared you, did it?"

"You knows about it?"

"I know that you and two others were sentenced to be shot by Captain Cobra, and that your brother vowed revenge. But you escaped, it seems."

"Maybe it's my ghost."

"Well, if I shot at you there would be no doubt of it."

"Jest so. We has turned dead ag'in' ther Cobras; they is once more on the trail, and we wants ter j'ine yer ter run 'em down."

"What do you know?"

"We knows enough ter make terms with you."

"Give me an idea of what you are worth to me."

"What can we tell you?"

"Where are the Cobras now?"

"They is on their way to the retreat."

"Where?"

"It is near the same old stronghold you raided."

"And their captain?"

"He is there, too."

"Where did you just come from?"

"The retreat."

"Then you are still Cobras?"

"Oh, no, we was scouting around, but they did not see us."

"Have they been up to any of their lawless deeds of late?"

"Yes; they robbed Lem Luby's coach this morning."

"Get much?"

"I'm thinking so, for they went right for their retreat again."

"How is it, if you know this, I see you coming from just the opposite direction?"

The men both looked confused, but Sol remarked:

"Well, you see, we had started for the fort to see you, but thought we'd better find out all we could, and so turned back to try and discover the secret retreat Captain

Cobra has on a cliff some miles back, and the first thing we knew we seen you in camp here."

Buffalo Bill knew that the man was lying, but said:

"That was it, was it?"

"Yas."

"And you, Lem Nichols, were you not afraid to venture to the fort?"

"No; for we thought as how you would perfect us, as we had come ter help yer run down ther Cobras."

"Have you been in Herders' Ranch of late?"

"I has, but Sol ain't, for he is supposed ter be dead, yer know."

"And you have friends there?"

"Yas, for they don't know I was a Cobra."

"How long were you there?"

"Two days."

"Where did you meet your brother?"

"I heerd in ther ranch from ther man as was ter execute him, but didn't, that he had spared him, as Sol had saved his life time and ag'in."

"So he didn't aim at Sol, as he whispered he wouldn't, and brother fell, though, all thought kilt like ther rest."

"My pard told me Sol had told him ter let me know whar' ter find him, so I got a lot of grub and ammunition, and went out to whar' he were, fer we intended ter down them Cobras."

"I sec. But everybody in Herders' Ranch believes that I have gone back to the Northwest, and I heard from good authority that there was much talk about it, so how is it you expected to find me at Fort Taos?"

Again the two men looked confused, and Lem said:

"Well, yer see, we thought if we didn't find you thar' we would Lieutenant Willis, your pard, and he'd be glad ter trade with us."

"Well, you have found me, so what trade have you to offer?"

"Yer see, pard, we has got a great deal to tell yer, so if yer lets us camp with yer ter-night we'll talk it over, and go back to-morrow ter ther secret retreat we spoke of, and which Sol knows about, show it to yer, and wait until yer hez gone to ther fort for sojers ter march on ter ther Cobras' retreat. an' bag 'em all."

"And you expect pardon for what you do?"

"An' some money ter boot."

"All right; I want proof that you know where that secret retreat is, so go and bring me something from there—a serape, a bridle—something to prove you know the place, and when you come back to camp turn in, for I am very tired, and we'll talk it over in the morning."

Buffalo Bill saw the quick glance each man gave the other, and noted how readily they agreed to his proposition.

But he kept his eyes on them until they had ridden off, and then set about spreading his blankets for the night.

CHAPTER XIV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

That the two men had lied to him Buffalo Bill well knew.

They had told him that the new retreat of the Cobras was near the old one, and it was all of forty miles away from it.

They had said that Captain Cobra was in camp, and he knew that he was not.

Their report that the coach had been robbed by the Cobras that morning was but half the truth.

That the two men had been dogging him, following his trail, he felt sure, and seeing him go into camp, had flanked around and approached from the direction he was traveling, was a part of their game.

He did not believe the two men knew of the secret retreat, for Captain Cobra had allowed only his officers and messenger to know it, as it was there he hid his booty.

Anxious to get the upper hand of the two outlaw brothers, Buffalo Bill planned to do so, and hence had made the proposition he did to them to prove their knowledge of the retreat and bring him word.

This got rid of them, and then he began to arrange for an all-night camp.

In the meantime the two outlaw brothers rode away from the camp with alacrity, just as the sun was setting.

They rode at a canter, and, looking behind them, saw the scout's preparations for camping.

They rode on until the shadows of night gathered about them, but did not drop the glimmer of the little campfire wholly out of their sight.

They took matters leisurely, returning as the darkness increased, walking and leading their horses, until they got within a quarter of a mile of the scout's camp.

Then they halted; staked out their horses, and sat down on the ground and conversed in low, earnest tones.

Thus one, two, three hours passed away, and then they mounted their horses and rode for the camp.

Going to the little meadowland, they staked their horses out with those of the scout, carrying their saddles up to the camp.

They placed their saddles upon one side of the fire, and began to spread their blankets, one of them remarking to the scout, whose form lay all muffled up near:

"It's only us, pard, for we has got back."

There was no reply, only a movement of the blankets.

Then the two men passed around the fire toward the blanket-enveloped form, one on either side, and by a quick motion of their right hands a revolver was leveled downward, and rapidly shot after shot rang out, as bullets were poured down into the form.

But suddenly a dark object fell from the tree over the head of Sol Nichols, striking him a blow that felled him to the ground, while the form of a man dropped feet foremost directly upon the head of Lem Nichols, and he, too, went down.

The blows were stunning, but quick as the movements of a panther, Buffalo Bill sprang from one to the other and seized the remaining revolver from the belt of each, while, placing his foot upon the throat of Sol Nichols, he began to wrap his lariat around him, while he called out sternly:

"If you move, Lem Nichols, I shall kill you!"

To firmly bind Sol Nichols was the work of a minute, and then another lariat was produced, and Lem Nichols came in for his turn.

"So you wished to make terms with me, did you?"

"And you went to the retreat as I asked you to do? And you have reformed?"

"I suspected you, and planned to trap you, for you were two to one."

"I took that log up in the tree to help me out, and it did so, and all the harm you have done is to shoot those blankets full of holes, but they belonged to your old friend, Officer Moccasin, not to me."

"While waiting for you I got a couple of hours' sleep, so feel much rested, and we'll push right on."

"Whar' yer goin'?" growled Sol.

"To the fort."

Fifteen minutes after, Buffalo Bill, with his prisoners bound in their saddles and their horses in lead, along with the pack animal, was on his way to find Lieutenant Willis and his men.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SCOUT ARRIVES.

When the capture of the two outlaw brothers had been made, Buffalo Bill felt that he had won a decided victory.

He congratulated himself that he had made the capture without having to take the life of either one.

He had some difficulty in making the men mount their horses, but when he took out his knife and said that he would use the point freely to make them obey him, they mounted to their saddles and were securely bound there.

When he started on his way he kept his prisoners close up to him, and thus led the way through the night.

Dawn at last came and an exclamation from Sol Nichols caused the scout to look around, and he saw that the canvas treasure bag on the back of the outlaw's horse was what surprised both of them.

"You recognize the bag, do you?"

"Yes, it is Captain Cobra's."

"It's mine, now. Picked it up."

"Thar' wasn't nothin' of value in it if yer picked it up."

"Not when I picked it up, maybe, but I've got some things in it now I prize."

"You has got Officer Moccasin's horse, too, I see."

"Who is Officer Moccasin?"

"One of ther Cobras."

"I guessed as much."

"He were second officer."

"Who is Rattle?"

"He's first officer."

"Where is he?"

"In the retreat I told you about."

"And Moccasin?"

"He's thar', too, I guesses, unless you've kilt him."

"No, I did not kill him."

"Whar' did yer git his horse?"

"I found him hitched to a tree."

There was a silence of some minutes, and then Lem Nichols asked:

"You is a scout from ther Northwest, ain't yer?"

"Yes."

"What's yer pay?"

"How does that interest you?"

"We wants ter know."

"Well, I get sixty dollars a month as regular pay, with five, ten and twenty dollars a day extra when in any very

important and special service; but I suppose you often steal much more at a single hold-up."

"Right you is, and what's more, we ain't squandered our money."

"Then I have done well in roping in two rich bankers."

"We didn't say that, for we hav'n't our money with us."

"Where is it?"

"That's our business; but if yer wants ter be reasonable, we'll talk to you."

"Go ahead."

"You ain't rich."

"No, indeed, I'm only a poor scout."

"We has got ther dust."

"Well?"

"Now, you has got us dead ter rights."

"Granted."

"You corralled us mighty slick, and yer did right, fer we war' huntin' yer scalp hard."

"Yes."

"Now, nobody knows you has us, and we don't want ter hang."

"No."

"We'll hang if yer takes us to Taos."

"Without the shadow of a doubt."

"Lordy! Don't speak so unfeeling."

"Do you wish me to pray with you?"

"No, but we wishes yer ter hear us say that we has money, and though we loves it, we loves life more."

"Yes."

"We c'u'd lead you to ther Cobras' den if yer'd trust us, and we'd like ther revenge o' doin' so; but yer won't."

"No; for you lied to me and sought to kill me."

"I do not need your aid, and will prove it by bringing other Cobras into Taos soon to hang with you."

The men were staggered, but they evidently believed the scout was not deceiving them.

So Sol Nichols said:

"Well, we has been robbin' and gamblin' fer years, and we has got a snug bit o' gold laid by; but if you'll do ther squar' thing by us, and let us go, we'll guide yer ter whar' our bank is, and yer can help yerself."

"Where is it?"

"Hid away in ther Taos and Ranch trail, some twenty miles from here."

"I'll free you after I get the gold you mean."

"Let us free now."

The scout laughed and said:

"We'll camp now for breakfast, and then push on for a camp where I have some friends I wish you to meet."

A halt of an hour was made, the scout getting breakfast, and allowing his prisoners' hands to be freed one at a time.

Then they mounted and rode on again at a more rapid pace.

Crossing the river he rushed on rapidly, for rest was ahead, and in less than an hour dashed into the secret camp, where he was greeted with the wildest of cheers by the scouts who had arrived there from the fort, Lieutenant Willis setting the example when he saw that he had two prisoners with him.

Buffalo Bill rode into the camp with a smile upon his face, and he politely acknowledged the cheers given him by raising his hat.

But for fear of missing the soldiers and scouts he

would have halted, tied his prisoners to a tree, and had several hours' sleep, for the reader will remember how he had been constantly on the go for four days and nights.

The prisoners showed their anxiety in their faces, and they were very pale and nervous.

They began now to see the shadow of the gallows falling upon them.

To Brazos Ben, Dot and several other scouts their faces were known.

They had been seen about Herders' Ranch time and again, and were regarded as hangers-on, but not suspected of other than gambling and being tough citizens until Sol Nichols had been trapped by Lieutenant Balfour, of Fort Sumner, aided by Buffalo Bill.

And all had believed that Sol Nichols had been executed by his comrades in outlawry, when here he was, riding into camp as the prisoner of Buffalo Bill, while along with him was Lem Nichols.

All gazed at the scout and his prisoners with interest, and Lieutenant Willis called out:

"Come, Cody, you are just in time to have dinner with me, so turn your prisoners over to Brazos Ben and come along."

"Thank you, sir."

"Here, Brazos Ben, look after these two men, and remember they are Snakes, so watch them well."

"I'll do it, chief," and Brazos Ben led his prisoners away.

Buffalo Bill then had dinner with the lieutenant, who, seeing that he was worn out and could scarcely keep his eyes open, made him go and lie down, remarking:

"We will talk it all over later, Bill."

The scout dropped upon his blanket, and was at once dead to the world in the deepest of slumbers.

Lieutenant Willis went with Brazos Ben to interview the prisoners, and they both began offering to him to betray their outlaw comrades, if he would pledge them their lives, liberty, and some money.

Lieutenant Willis heard all that they had to say, and replied:

"I'll leave all to Chief Cody."

"But we can make arrangements with you, sir, as ther scout said he would leave it all ter yer," urged Sol Nichols.

"When he tells me what he wishes I will quickly answer."

"But ef we don't hev yer promise give us right now we won't answer, ef we hang fer it."

"All right; it will be your necks."

The men groaned, for they saw that their appeal was useless.

"I put irons on 'em ther sergeant gave me, sir, as the lariats hurt them," said Brazos Ben.

"That was right, for we wish not to harm them."

"And they had a good dinner, sir, but forgot to bring their appetites along with them."

"They'll eat when they are hungry, Ben."

"Now, which of you is Sol Nichols, for I can hardly tell, though I have seen you both before."

"I'm Sol Nichols."

"I thought you had been shot by Captain Cobra."

"I h'aint so, yer sees, though it ain't his fault I'm living."

"How did you escape?"

"I'll tell yer, sir, ef yer'll promise me my life."
 "I am not so anxious to know, and make no promises."
 "You, Lem Nichols, see that Buffalo Bill found the outlaw stronghold without calling upon you."
 "I wish I'd shot yer that day I held yer up on ther trail and offered ter make terms with yer," growled Lem Nichols.

"Too late for regrets on that point now."
 "Come, Ben, I wish to talk with you," and Brazos Ben followed the officer away on a walk along the stream.
 The camp kept very quiet, so as not to disturb the sleeping scout, though nothing short of a shot would have awakened him then.
 The afternoon passed away, night came, and at supper time Buffalo Bill arose greatly refreshed, and sat down to enjoy the meal with Lieutenant Willis.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORY TOLD.

"You certainly rally rapidly, Cody, for when you came in this afternoon you were nearer dead than alive, and now you are yourself again."

Lieutenant McKenny Willis made the remark as he sat at his camp supper with the scout.

"You see, sir, I had ridden considerably over two hundred miles without sleep for nearly four nights, and with but little rest, while I had the strain upon me of the two robberies, and playing outlaw myself in holding up Lem Luby and then in being for a while an El Cobra in Moccasin's band, after which I had a night of it with my two prisoners."

"It is a wonder you are alive, Cody."

"Oh, I'm very much alive, lieutenant, and ready for another long jaunt, but I wish to tell you just what I did, and then show you what is before us."

"I am most anxious to know, but I saw you needed rest and sleep first of all, so did not ask you anything."

Buffalo Bill had finished his supper and as he and the lieutenant lighted their pipes, he asked:

"Can the sergeant and Brazos Ben be present, sir, for it will be best to have them know, as we may have to divide our forces."

"Certainly," and the lieutenant ordered Brazos Ben and Sergeant Long to come to his camp.

They were soon there and he said, pleasantly:

"Chief Cody has awakened from the dead, sergeant, and wishes you and Brazos Ben to hear the story he is going to tell me."

Then he continued:

"I went to see your prisoners, Cody, and with Brazos Ben as a witness, had a talk with them."

"They tried to impress upon me that you had arranged with them to betray their outlaw comrades, and no time was to be lost, and all that was wanted was my pledge of setting them free."

"I hope you did not so pledge yourself, sir," said Buffalo Bill, quickly.

"Not I, for I mistrusted them."

After a moment of silence, Buffalo Bill went on to say:

"You heard, sir, Ned Nordeck's story of how he was robbed by the men whom he supposed bona fide passengers?"

"Yes, the colonel wrote me, and Sergeant Long and Brazos Ben told me what they knew."

"That was a most clever piece of outlawry."

"It was, sir, and when Ned told me he was almost heartbroken, for they had taken everything."

"I was going to circle around to get their trail, but he happened to tell me that they had said that other Cobras intended to hold up Lem Luby, so I at once decided to try and checkmate them."

"I told Ned not to make known to the colonel about the men we wished, and where I could join them, and came to my secret camp here and got a fresh horse and wrote the note to you, and, going to the ford, left it there."

"I found it all right, as it frightened my horse, and I built a fire and read it, so went on and met the men."

"That was what I hoped for, sir."

"But I then started for the Fort Sumner trail and it was no easy ride, as I went by guess."

"It was a wonderful ride, to make at night."

"I camped on the trail, sir, and I may say really held up Lem Luby and robbed him, for I took all he had, threw out his strong box empty, and we arranged to have it appear that the Cobras had done the work."

"Then I went off to hide my booty, changed my mind, and returned to the trail just as Lem Luby was driving off, for the outlaws had held him up, and, doubting his story after being robbed, had made him return to the scene with them."

"It was well that you had arranged for them."

"Yes, sir; I had half suspected they might, and Luby would be in trouble if there were no signs."

"But there were."

"There were, and as Luby drove away he saw me and looked half scared to death."

"Where were the outlaws?"

"They were there, sir, for I had arranged my toilet, put on my disguise, and was playing Viper, the Cobra captain's messenger."

"Bill Cody, you dare death too far," said Lieutenant Willis, sternly.

"Now, sir, there is the whole booty taken from Ned Nordeck and Lem Luby, and more, too, that was hidden away in the cliff, for there is a bag of gold dust, and one of jewelry taken from passengers."

"I have told you that story, and now I have a plan, as we have gotten the treasure, to capture the robbers."

The lieutenant, Sergeant Long and Brazos Ben listened with the most rapt attention to the story of Buffalo Bill.

Another man they might have doubted, but not the man whose whole life was made up of acts of heroism.

They had the booty before their eyes as proof.

"Well!"

That was all that Brazos Ben had said, and it expressed volumes for him.

Sergeant Long made no comment, but simply saluted the scout in silence.

As for Lieutenant Willis, he was silent for a moment, and then said:

"Now, Cody, what else?"

"The capture, first, of Captain Cobra, sir."

"But who is Captain Cobra?"

"I do not know, sir. He is the new leader, as the old leader of the band was killed a short time ago."

"Where is he?"

"I do not know, sir."

"How are you to find him?"

"I have a guide, sir. One who will lead me to him, sir."

"I do not understand."

"You remember the splendid horse I got from the messenger, Viper?"

"Ah, yes."

"Now, he was comparatively fresh when I captured him, had not been ridden far, and hence came from some of the ranches."

"I see."

"The man Viper came from Old Mexico, from the captain's note, so the horse he rode must have been left, as well tired out, at the ranch where this new animal was secured."

"Now, my plan, Lieutenant Willis, is—of course, subject to your approval—to have you, Brazos Ben, two scouts, and the corporal and two soldiers go together, making eight of us in all, for we do not know what force may be at the ranch where we find Captain Cobra."

"Sergeant Long, with Dot Driver and the rest of the command, can go over across the ford and camp there at a good place I know, and on our way back from the ranches they will be right on our trail to the new retreat of the outlaws."

"Ah!"

"We can pick up the whole force then, sir, and, keeping clear of the trails, strike for the new retreat, which I feel certain I can find, getting there before they learn of Captain Cobra's capture, or, if we fail to catch him at the ranches, before he learns of the attempt, we can doubtless bag him with his men."

"The very thing."

"If we fail to find him at one of the ranches, sir, we shall at least know who he is, and if he has gone to Herders' Ranch we can go by and pick him up, sending one of the scouts to tell the sergeant to move across to the Fort Sumner trail and meet us, which will save time."

"I see, and a good plan it is."

"Now, sir, we can go to the point where I met Viper, and from there I will ride his horse, giving the animal free rein."

"When we see which way he goes, riding as we will to the place by night, we will the next day, you and I, sir, go with Viper's horse in lead, letting the others follow."

"Yes."

"It is my belief, sir, that the horse will tree the outlaw chief, so to speak, as I have an idea that he is some one who is leading a double life of rancher and Cobra both."

"I begin to think so also, Cody. When do you wish to start?"

"About dawn, sir, so as to make the ride through to Viper's grave before night and have a short rest for our work to follow."

"You hear, sergeant, so arrange accordingly, but say not a word to any one of what our plan is or what you have heard."

The sergeant and Brazos Ben left for their respective camps, the lieutenant and Buffalo Bill turned in, and all was soon silent in the man-hunter's encampment.

CHAPTER XVII.

NORDECK'S SUSPECTED PASSENGERS.

The sun was just rising the next morning when the command pulled out of the little camp.

In the lead rode Buffalo Bill as guide, and Lieutenant Willis was riding with him.

Then came Brazos Ben and the sergeant, and following was the corporal with his sixteen men behind him.

The two prisoners were next, with a scout by the side of each, and Dot Driver followed with the rest of the scouts, the pack-horses and extra animals, among the later being Viper's splendid steed that was yet to play a most important part.

Crossing the ford, they were about to turn off to the right, to go to the camp Buffalo Bill had in view, when Lieutenant Willis recalled the fact that it was "stage day," and Ned Nordeck was about due at the ford.

So they waited by the side of the trail, and soon the coach was discerned far away, coming toward the ford.

"It would be well, sir, for those who might be in the coach not to see the command, as they perhaps would mention it in Herders' Ranch, and I should not be seen, either, so you and Brazos Ben could meet Ned Nordeck, sir."

"I am glad you spoke of it, Cody, for you are right," answered the officer, so the little command moved on to the camp Cody had in view, and when the coach crossed the ford only Lieutenant Willis and Brazos Ben were there.

Ned Nordeck gave a signal that he had passengers inside, and drew rein, while those within the coach looked out.

"Well, Nordeck, you have overtaken us, but we will follow you close into Herders' Ranch as soon as my five men, now up in the timber, join us," said the lieutenant.

At his words a broad smile broke over the face of Ned Nordeck, and he replied:

"All right, sir. I shall not drive over fast, though I came along pretty well to the ford, for I were detained picking up the six gents inside the coach, sir—miners from up Santa Fe way, they tells me, and hoofing it across country, fearing to be robbed."

"Ah, that is it, is it?" and, riding up to the coach, Lieutenant Willis glanced within and said:

"You are miners, then?"

"Yes, sir, and we has our boodle along, and was afraid of riding horseback, or sticking to the trails, for fear ther Cobras we has heard so much about might jump us."

"But we struck ther stage trail, and concluded ter ride from here on," said one of the men.

"Well, you need have no fear now, for the robberies of late have put us on our guard at the fort, and you will be well protected, though you may not see us, and all we wish is for the Cobras to make an attack, for there are more than you see to take care of you."

Then turning to Ned Nordeck, the officer continued:

"You have a valuable freight, driver?"

"Yes, sir; a lot of gold dust came into Taos on the coach from Santa Fe."

"All right, have no fear, it will be safe."

"If not in sight, we will be near enough to aid you."

"Drive on, now," and Lieutenant Willis nodded as he

saw that Ned Nordeck had scribbled something on a slip of paper and dropped it over his dashboard into the trail.

The coach rolled on, and the lieutenant and Brazos Ben remained seated upon their horses in the trail, the former remarking:

"Ben, those are Cobras, or they belie their looks."

"Sure, sir, for did you see how scared they looked when they saw us."

"Yes, I saw that Ned Nordeck was in trouble the moment he drove up.

"The coach is out of sight now, so hand me that paper he threw down."

Ben quickly dismounted, and picking up the crumpled paper, handed it to the officer.

Smoothing it out, he read, scrawled with a pencil:

"I picked these pilgrims up six mile back.

"One I kin swear was with t'others that held me up t'other day, and I believes they is Cobras; so stick to me, fer I has thirty thousand in gold dust along."

"Ben, is there not a trail where we can cut the trail off within the next few miles?"

"Yes, sir, down Dry Canyon, for there is no water in it now, and it saves us three miles."

"Good! Buffalo Bill is not over half a mile away, so we will make the ride,

"Come on."

They dashed on after the command, and were not long in overtaking them.

"That explains what Moccasin told me, sir, that there were to be three hold-ups together.

"We can nip this one, too," said the scout, when he had read the driver's note and heard what the lieutenant had to say.

Directing the corporal to take half of his soldiers and the scouts, with the prisoners and pack-horses, on to the camp, which Dot Driver knew how to find, the other half of the command dashed away for Dry Canyon to head off the coach.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN LUCK.

When Ned Nordeck drove on he wore a different expression from what he had when he came to the fort.

He knew that there was some trouble in the coach.

The men were talking in low, earnest tones, and he sat smiling blandly on the box.

"Nipped, by the great Rio Grande!" he muttered.

"I'm in luck, or I'm a liar.

"Half an hour ago I was as good as robbed, but now I is ther top dog in the bow-wow pickernic."

The road was a trifle rough, after leaving the ford, as Ned had to wind around a small mountain to reach the plain beyond.

It was through the other side of this mountain that Dry Canyon ran, in the summer a cut-off of several miles, but never traveled by the coach in spring and winter.

"Hold on, pard."

Ned drew rein as he was approaching the spot where Dry Canyon came out into the trail.

"What is it?"

"Say, Herders' Ranch are a pretty tough place, ain't it?"

"No more tougher than ther average."

"We has heerd thet it is, and we don't want to take our dust in thar' and be robbed of it, so we'll continue to hoof it."

"How so?"

"You has our pay fer ye'r ride, so keep it, and we'll hoof it, givin' Herders' Ranch ther go by, and showin' ourselves in settlements only where we knows honest folks lives in 'em."

"It's your funeral, not mine, so do as yer pleases."

"All right; good-by, and thank yer."

The men had lost no time in getting their traps together, and as they got out of the coach they were suddenly startled by the words:

"Which way, men?"

It was Lieutenant Willis who asked the question.

He was on foot and rose like an apparition from among the rocks, while half a dozen scouts and soldiers appeared coming up, it seemed, from the very ground all around.

The six men did not see the whole force, or they might have thought before they acted.

They saw the officer and several soldiers on one side.

They failed to see other soldiers ahead, and Buffalo Bill and half a dozen scouts in the shadow of the trees behind them.

So they made the mistake of opening fire.

Their fire was a deadly one, for a scout and a soldier dropped dead under it.

But the fire that answered theirs was more deadly, for three of the men were killed and the other three threw up their hands, but one was not quick enough, as Ned Nordeck called out:

"I'm inter this pickernic with both feet."

He fired as he spoke, and the one who had been the leader also fell.

The other two, terribly scared, were quickly seized and put in irons.

"We did not expect a fight, Cody, but a quiet surrender; but they fired first and killed a soldier and one of your scouts."

"Yes, sir; and leave four less of their number to hang."

"Now to see that we made no mistake."

A search of the traps of the pretended miners showed that the alleged "gold dust" were pebbles and sand.

The man whom Ned Nordeck had thought he recognized as one of the band with outlaw officer Rattle, had been killed, but he was sure that it was the same one, while, that no mistake had been made in attacking Ned's passengers, there was proof in the costume the party wore under their miners' garb, while on the body of the chief was found a note in Spanish from Captain Cobra to Adder, as he was called, stating that when word was brought to him from Rattle, stating that the coach had been held up on its run to Taos, he, Adder, was to attack it on the return, when it was known by him, Captain Cobra, that a large sum in gold dust would be sent through from Santa Fe.

The note also stated that the men were then to strike across to the Fort Sumner trail, and catch Lem Luby's coach on its run to Herders' Ranch, as they would have ample time to go back to where they had left their horses and do so, and he, the chief, also knew that a good sum in dust was also to be carried by the stage on that run.

Continuing, the letter stated that if the four attacks arranged were successful, the Cobras could go into their

new retreat and remain in hiding for a couple of months, until the impression was given out that they had been satisfied with their large robberies and had really left the trails.

"A precious letter, this, Cody, and a dead give away of all their plans.

"But we can go on now with our plan, for Lem Luby will be safe, as he goes through to-morrow, and this was the band that intended to hold him up."

"They'll be held up with a rope now," said the delighted Nordeck.

"I will send men back to pick up their horses and take them to camp, while we go on as we intended, Cody, for the sergeant will attend to that and also to burying the dead.

"You, Nordeck, go on your way, now, and report in Herders' Ranch how you were robbed on your return, for we wish it believed that you were."

"I will, lieutenant, and thank yer fer ther chance ter lie," was the reply of the driver, who was greatly tickled over his lucky escape.

Sergeant Long was given his instructions to go to the camp Buffalo Bill had decided upon, and to carry the dead with him, and bury them there, while Dot Driver was to go in search of the outlaws' horses.

Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Willis were now mounted for their ride, both well pleased with the work they had done.

Accompanying them were the corporal and two soldiers, and Brazos Ben and a couple of scouts, and they started off at a good pace, though in heading off the coach as they had, they had not lost much time and had gone hardly over half a mile out of their way.

As Brazos Ben knew every trail in that part of the country, and could "cut corners," as Buffalo Bill said, the latter being new there and with only a general knowledge of the lay of the land, he led the way, and set the pace.

A halt of an hour was made at noon, and then, pushing on, they reached the scene of Buffalo Bill's and Viper's night encounter, while the sun was yet half an hour high.

"You cut corners well, Ben, and saved us miles, as I could see, for when I rode it in the night I had to take the way as I found it," said Buffalo Bill.

They went into camp near the grave of Viper, and after a good supper the outlaw's horse was saddled by Buffalo Bill, and Lieutenant Willis, Brazos Ben, a soldier and a scout mounted to accompany him, leaving the corporal and two others in camp.

Buffalo Bill went to the trail where he had halted Viper, the others following some distance behind, and just in sight in the twilight.

Turning the head of the horse toward the ranches, he said:

"Now, good horses, show us where your home is."

The horse started off at a brisk walk, and getting out of the timber, went into a steady canter, as though he knew just where he was going and was anxious to get there.

The scout reined him back as he seemed inclined to increase his speed, being anxious to go on.

Behind, a short distance, followed Lieutenant Willis

and the others, watching the movements of the dumb guide with a great deal of interest.

So the miles were passed over until they had been a couple of hours on their way, and then ahead loomed up a light.

Straight for it went the horse, and soon halted at a gate leading into a ranch.

"This is his home, sir."

"He came direct, even before the light was visible.

"We will return in the morning and investigate, having daytime for our work rather than night, if you deem best, sir."

"I do, Cody, for there is no immediate hurry," responded the lieutenant, and a rapid gallop back to the camp was made.

They were all in their blankets by eleven o'clock, but up again and in the saddle when the sun was rising.

Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Willis then rode ahead alone, Brazos Ben following, with the others, yet not to come in sight of those at the ranch, but to await in a clump of timber a mile away, and await a signal for his approach, if needed, the signal to be a waving of a white handkerchief.

It was about nine o'clock when the lieutenant and the scout reached the gate of the ranch where they had stopped the night before under the guidance of the outlaw's horse.

The same dumb guide was along now, but was not ridden, the scout leading him from the timber where the others had been left in waiting.

When they came to the gate of the ranch they opened it and rode in, Buffalo Bill remarking:

"Now to see if our dumb guide has led us astray."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE COWBOY'S STORY.

The ranch was about the most pretentious in that wild land, and as strongly built as a fort was the large log cabin.

There was an inclosure of some dozen acres surrounding the home cabin and the outhouses near, the fence being a stout stockade, like the forts of the frontier.

A grove was there, a stream ran through the inclosure, grass was plentiful and the fenced-in portion could be used as a corral for horses and cattle in case of a raid by Indians.

In one corner of the inclosure, on the bank of the stream, and sheltered by heavy timber, were the cabins of the cowboys, some eighth of a mile distant from the ranchero's cabin.

A dozen fine horses were running about, and as many cows within the stockade, while there were also a few sheep, chickens, ducks, geese and hogs, giving it a very homelike appearance.

Riding up to the cabin, a hail brought from the detached kitchen a Mexican woman, who appeared to recognize the lieutenant, for she said in broken English:

"Senor will be sorry he not home to see senor officer."

"Where is the senor?" asked the lieutenant.

"He go early to see pretty senorita—come back to-night"

"Thank you; but we picked up this horse on our way.

"Is there no one here to take him?"

"I call my man, Jacinto," and placing her hands to her lips she gave a call, loud, long and winding, the notes as clear as a bugle.

They saw almost immediately a man come out of one of the cowboys' cabins, spring upon a saddled horse and ride rapidly toward them.

"Jacinto come—he know, señor.

"Have señor had breakfast?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Senors stay to dinner?"

"No, thank you, we will go over to the ranch and see your master," assured the lieutenant.

A moment after the horseman came up and the woman met him and said quickly, in Spanish:

"The señor officer is a friend of our señor."

The man was a Mexican half-breed, and said, politely, in English:

"The señor is away.

"I am Jacinto, the cowboy chief of ranch, senors."

"We are going to the ranch where your master is visiting, but here is a horse this gentleman picked up and we wish to know if he belongs here, for he was saddled and bridled as you see, and perhaps some harm has befallen his rider.

"Do you know the animal?"

Both Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Willis saw the start of the man as he glanced at the horse, which before he had not appeared to notice.

He rode up to him, looked him over, and the saddle and bridle, too, and said:

"Yes, señor captain, the horse belongs here; he is one of the señor's best animals."

"How did he get away, I wonder?"

"A stranger señor came here several days ago, and the señor loaned him his horse to go on with, as he had important business north of here."

"Ah! but can harm have befallen him?"

"Where did the señor find him?"

"Some fifteen miles from here, in a heavy timber, north, near the hills."

"Did the señor find him loose and saddled and bridled?"

"Yes," said Buffalo Bill, wishing to relieve the lieutenant of any prevarication they might have to indulge in.

"I found the horse, and he was saddled and bridled as you see."

The Mexican's face showed that he was worried, and said:

"Perhaps his rider was killed on his way back, or maybe the horse got away from him when he halted for rest."

"Yes; but I'll leave the horse with you, as you say he belongs to the señor, and we will tell the ranchero about finding him."

"Please do so, señor, and if his rider does not come on foot soon, I'll go in search of him."

"No, you had better await the return of the señor, for we are going to come back with him."

"Yes, señor."

"Well, we must be off, so you take the horse."

With this they rode away, and they saw that the Mexican and his wife were talking earnestly together.

"Well, Bill, what do you think?"

"The horse belongs there, sir."

"Beyond a doubt; but do you make anything out of that fact?"

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"We are on the right track."

"It is hard to believe."

"True, but we will soon know," and the two passed on to the timber, where the others were awaiting them, and upon looking back saw Jacinto was just leaving the ranch and following their trail.

"Lieutenant Willis, we must catch that fellow," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes."

"Corporal, ride on with your men into a hiding place, and Scout Cody and I will see to that fellow."

The corporal rode on with the others, and soon were hidden from view, while Lieutenant Willis and Buffalo Bill followed for a while, and then turned as though to ride back to the ranch.

As they neared the edge of the timber, they saw Jacinto not far away, and coming at a rapid canter.

He saw them, half drew rein, and then came on in a confused way, while he said:

"Lost you way, senors?"

"I feared you would, so come to guide you."

"Thank you, my man."

"We wish you to go with us, so lead the way," responded Lieutenant Willis.

Jacinto showed that he was worried, but rode to the front, and a moment after Lieutenant Willis and Buffalo Bill rode to either side of him, the scout's hand grasped his bridle rein, and two revolvers covered him.

"My man, if you do not wish to die, quietly submit."

"We are going to your master, and you are to go with us."

"Oh, señor, I have done nothing."

"I am not accusing you, only we need you just now," and as Lieutenant Willis spoke Buffalo Bill had disarmed the man.

Soon they came upon the corporal and his party, and the fear of the Mexican was very evident, Brazos Ben remarking:

"I know him, lieutenant, and his name is Jacinto."

"He is known as a bad man in Herders' Ranch."

Having slipped irons upon his wrists which the corporal had along, the party rode rapidly on for two hours, and, reaching a timbered ridge, a halt was made.

"Scout Cody and I will go on as before, and you remain here, corporal, until Brazos Ben sees our signal that tells you are all needed."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Cody, are you ready?"

"All ready, sir," answered Buffalo Bill, and the two rode out of the timber and directed their way toward a ranch in the distance.

"Now, Cody, we will soon know it all."

"Yes, lieutenant."

"I wish you to act at the proper time and do as you deem best.

"When you are sure of your game do as you deem best, and I will back you up."

With this the two rode out of the timber and followed a well-beaten trail toward the ranch, leaving Brazos Ben and his fellow-scout hidden in a thicket, each with a field glass, to watch them and await a signal.

"It will be a great shock to them all if your suspicions prove to be correct, Cody," said the lieutenant, as they rode along.

"It will, indeed, sir.

"But it had better be a severe shock now than wait until it is too late, and their happiness is wrecked."

"You are right.

"I shall feel glad indeed if I can have done anything to prevent so fearful an alternative as appears to be now pending from falling upon that happy family."

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"See, there they are seated upon the piazza."

"Yes, sir, and the ranchero is there, I notice."

"Then our ride is not in vain.

"Here we are at the gate, and, opening it, they rode into the stockade inclosure of Evergreen Ranch, the home of a wealthy rancher named Reeves.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ACCUSATION.

Rose Reeves, the daughter of the owner of Evergreen Ranch, known as the Rose of the Ranch, was about to order her horse for a ride when she saw a horseman coming toward the house.

She took a glass from where it hung upon the piazza, turned it upon the horseman, and said:

"It is he. Now I shall make my charge direct."

She therefore resumed her seat in an easy-chair, picked up a book and pretended to read, though read she did not.

Her manner seemed nervous and ill at ease.

She was seated upon a side of the large cabin that was not the living end, and no one was near her or within call.

She had walked hi her when she recognized the coming horseman, and had drawn a seat near to her own.

Near her were the steps that led to the rack where visitors hitched their horses, and before her was a fine view of the surrounding country.

The horseman, who was Taylor Travis, a young ranchero, came along slowly.

He seemed in no hurry, and had not quickened his pace in his long ride across the prairie.

Entering the stockade through the massive gate of logs that hung on weights and rose and lowered by a slight pressure, instead of opening on hinges, he rode up to the hitching rack, dismounted, and, seeing where the maiden was seated, waved his hat to her.

She bowed in return, and approaching, he ascended to the piazza and joined her.

She was now perfectly calm, and received him with a smile and a grasp of the hand.

After some general conversation for a half an hour, he asked her if she would not go for a ride with him.

"Father and mother have gone over to Bender's Ranch to see Mrs. Bender, who is quite ill, and I prefer to await their return," was the reply.

"Suppose we ride and meet them," he asked.

"No; I prefer to remain here."

At that moment, approaching the house with Buffalo Bill, Lieutenant Willis saw the young girl rise to greet them, and she warmly grasped his hand, with the words:

"I must alone give you welcome, Lieutenant Willis, as my parents are absent on a visit to a neighbor who is ill, but they will soon return."

"I thank you for your welcome, Miss Reeves, and desire to present my particular friend, Chief of Scouts William F. Cody, whom you have heard of as Buffalo Bill."

"Ah, I am most happy indeed to welcome you, Mr. Cody, for indeed I have heard of you many times. You are both acquainted, I believe, with Mr. Taylor Travis."

Taylor Travis had remained back where they had been seated, leaving Rose to advance alone and receive her guests, but as she mentioned his name he advanced quickly.

"Indeed, we have met before, Miss Rose, and I am most happy in meeting both Lieutenant Willis and Chief Cody again.

"I had no idea that you were in this part of the country, gentlemen, you, Mr. Cody, having returned to the Northwest, it was said."

"It was a mistake, Mr. Travis, for as I had not completed the work that brought me to Fort Taos, I remained to do so," said Buffalo Bill, as they all now took seats upon the piazza.

"I thought that you had done your work remarkably well, Mr. Cody, as you drove the Cobras out of the country," remarked Rose.

"Yes, they disbanded after you had killed their leader," added Taylor Travis.

"No, that was a blind only—I will not say to have me leave for the Northwest, but to lull suspicion regarding them, have valuable freight sent through on the coaches, and thus be able to make several attacks consecutively and get large rewards."

"You astound me, Mr. Cody.

"Are you aware that they intended doing as you say?" asked Taylor Travis.

"They have made the attacks already, sir, in three different places, holding up Lem Luby's Fort Sumner coach, again the Taos coach, driven by Ned Nordeck, and the second time catching the latter driver on his return to Berders' Ranch."

"Can this be possible, Lieutenant Willis?" asked Taylor Travis.

"It is, sir."

"Then the booty gained must have been very large, as the company was expecting no hold-ups."

"The drivers state that they carried very rich cargoes. But this can hardly be interesting, Miss Reeves."

"On the contrary, Lieutenant Willis, I am most deeply interested."

"I suppose, then, that you and Mr. Cody are again on the trail of El Cobras?"

"Yes; and we came to this country to get what aid we could. We just went by your ranch, Travis."

"I regret I was not at home, but command me if I can serve you."

"Thank you, we will," said the officer, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"By the way, Mr. Travis, we picked up a horse on our trail, which your man Jacinto said was yours, bearing the saddle and bridle of some friend you loaned him to, having just come on from Mexico."

"Indeed! and where was the rider?"

"I strongly suspect that harm has befallen him, for there were bloodstains on the saddle, and——"

"My God! Can my poor friend have been murdered?" said Taylor Travis as he was visibly affected.

"The horse we left with your man, promising to inform you of what had occurred."

"Pardon me, Miss Rose, if I at once return to my home, for the gentleman Mr. Cody speaks of was a very dear friend of mine, and——"

"We will accompany you to your home, Mr. Travis, we go that trail," and Buffalo Bill arose.

"I shall be happy to have you come, gentlemen, but I

shall ride like the wind, and I know the hospitality of this house too well to believe Miss Reeves will allow you to depart before dinner. I must be off at once, for——"

"You will remain here, sir!"

"Hands up!" cried Buffalo Bill, as he covered the ranchero with his revolver, to the utter amazement of the Rose of Evergreen Ranch, while Lieutenant Willis calmly looked on, a smile of triumph hovering about his lips.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNMASKED.

Rose Reeves uttered a slight exclamation of amazement and alarm commingled, but she did not appear like one who was in love with the man whom Buffalo Bill held under cover of his revolver.

The ranchero, as white as though dead, for an instant seemed dazed, and did not raise his hands.

Then he said in a reproachful tone:

"What horrid joke is this, Mr. Cody?"

"It is far from a joke."

"Hold out your hands, or I will shoot you dead in your tracks!"

The man saw the scout's eyes, and reluctantly held one hand out, while he moved the other toward his hip.

"If you place your hand on your revolver, you will never draw it! Obey me!"

Rose Reeves stood calm, white-faced and watchful.

Lieutenant Willis did not move.

The ranchero suddenly held out both hands, and quickly Buffalo Bill snapped a pair of steel manacles upon the wrists.

Then he hastily unbuckled the belt of arms the ranchero wore beneath his riding jacket, and said:

"Sit there, sir!"

Dropping into the seat, the ranchero called out:

"I appeal to you, Miss Reeves! This is your house, and you allow this desperado to insult me thus?"

"Mr. Cody, sir, is an officer of the law. If he is making a mistake, he must be responsible."

"I can do nothing to save you, for an officer of the army, by his presence and silence, upholds the act of Mr. Cody."

The words were quietly uttered, and, turning to her, in his courteous but frank way, Buffalo Bill said:

"I owe you an humble apology, Miss Reeves, for creating such a scene in your home, in your presence."

"But this man intended to escape us, and I acted as I did to avoid having to kill him, or be killed by him."

"Of what do you accuse him, sir?"

"I am sorry, Miss Reeves, as he has been an honored guest beneath your roof, to tell you that I accuse him of

leading a double life—of being a ranchero, honored by those who know him, and secretly of being one of the Cobra band of outlaws."

"What! A Cobra!" cried Rose, excitedly.

"Yes, Miss Reeves."

"It is false! He lies that says so."

"I hope, when you make such a terrible accusation, Mr. Cody, you have the proof."

"I have what is satisfactory proof to me, Miss Reeves, and Lieutenant Willis can say whether he believes as I do or not."

"I believe that he is all that Mr. Cody says, and more," was the officer's reply.

"And you, too, utter a base lie against me!" cried the ranchero.

Lieutenant Willis made no reply, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"I not only accuse you of being a Cobra, sir, but of being Captain Cobra, the new chief of the outlaw band."

In his calm way, Buffalo Bill continued to tell his story, and, pledging Rose Reeves to secrecy, told how the coach robberies had been thwarted; that the lieutenant, with scouts and soldiers, was aiding him, and he gave a signal that caused Brazos Ben and the others to ride out of their hiding place and come at a gallop toward the house.

He had told of his meeting with Viper, the letter he carried, and how the outlaw's horse had led them to the ranch of Taylor Travis.

Then he continued:

"The man Jacinto told us that it was his master's horse, and that the one he had loaned it to was a friend of his from Mexico.

"That aided me in my suspicion, and, when we captured this man Jacinto, who is coming yonder, when he was on his way to look up the body of Viper, we found, upon searching him, a list of cattle and horses on the Travis ranch, and some instructions.

"Jacinto told us the ranchero had written it, and it was the same handwriting that was on the outlaw Viper's instructions to the man Rattle.

"Here is the Viper note, so, if you have any of the writing of Taylor Travis, you can satisfy yourself by comparison with this note of instructions written by Captain Cobra."

"I have several notes written me by Mr. Taylor Travis.

"I will get them, and see how they compare with the writing of Captain Cobra," and Rose left the piazza.

When she returned, in a few minutes, she found the party, under the corporal, had arrived, bringing with them Jacinto, who glanced despairingly toward the ranchero as they rode up.

Resuming, Buffalo Bill said:

"Before you compare the writing, Miss Reeves, permit

me to say that all during our conversation about the horse picked up and the acts of Cobra, both Lieutenant Willis and I closely watched the face of Taylor Travis, and were convinced that we had made no mistake.

"When he attempted to leave for his home, to escape, Lieutenant Willis gave me the signal agreed upon, that he was sure we had made no mistake, and I acted."

Rose Reeves took the note found on Viper, and compared it with her letters.

A mere glance was sufficient, for she said:

"The same hand penned both.

"I wish no further proof of the man's guilt, and I now can understand many of his actions that were blanks to me before.

"I had just told him I did not trust him when you gentlemen rode up; but there come my father and mother, I am happy to say."

Lieutenant Willis went to greet the ranchero and his wife, who seemed surprised at the appearance of so many horsemen there.

The story was quickly told, and Taylor Travis was led away by the corporal, who had orders not to allow him to converse with the other prisoner, Jacinto.

Then Mr. and Mrs. Reeves would have it so, that they should remain to dinner, as it was then noon, and Lieutenant Willis and Buffalo Bill sat down with them in the dining-room, while a most substantial meal was served to the others out on the piazza.

Immediately after dinner, Buffalo Bill suggested that they start, as it was most necessary to get to the ranch of Taylor Travis before an alarm could be given, and then to press on to the retreat of the outlaws before any news should reach Herders' Ranch of Captain Cobra's capture.

It was one o'clock when farewells were said to the ladies, for Mr. Reeves and a couple of his cowboys went on with the party, and at a gallop Buffalo Bill led the way for the Oak Park Ranch, where Travis had his home.

The horses were kept at a good speed to the timber near the ranch, and there a halt was made, and all watched Buffalo Bill while he made a gag and thrust it into the mouth of Captain Cobra, and bound his manacled hands to the saddle horn.

Jacinto was treated the same way, and then the scout said:

"We want no calls, no signals, and, to make all appear well, lieutenant, will you lead, with Captain Cobra, so as to make him look like a host conducting friends to his home?"

"I will, Cody," was the reply, and the party set out for the ranch.

The wife of Jacinto saw them coming, and did not observe the condition of the ranchero or her husband until

they halted, and then she gave a wild yell, and bolted like a deer for the cowboys' quarters.

But Buffalo Bill's lariat gave a whirl in the air, and caught the Mexican woman before she had time to alarm the cowboys.

Instantly, Brazos Ben had dragged her into the house, and the cowboy who came at her call, supposing he was wanted, was quickly made a prisoner.

"There are four of my pards out with the cattle, lieutenant; are you going to rope them in, too—and for what, may I ask?" he said.

The gag having been removed from his mouth, Captain Cobra said:

"That man and his four pards are innocent, for only Jacinto and his wife know who and what I am."

"All right; if innocent, they will have nothing to fear.

"Mr. Reeves, you will remain in charge of the ranch, with your two men, for all of the cowboys here must remain prisoners until we finish our work," said Lieutenant Willis.

One of the cowboys from the Reeves ranch was then sent after the four out with the cattle, and they came in without suspicion of harm, and made no resistance when covered.

"We leave it all to you, Mr. Reeves, for you know us," said one.

A search of the cabin had proven to Lieutenant Willis and Buffalo Bill that they had proof enough of the ranchero's guilt to hang a dozen men; and then, mounted upon fresh horses, the very best on the ranch, the party started off, carrying their prisoners, Captain Cobra and Jacinto, with them, the woman and the five cowboys being left to the care of Ranchero Reeves and his two men.

"We must reach the sergeant's camp by midnight, rest until dawn, and then push for the new retreat of the Cobras," said Buffalo Bill, and the men determined not to spare themselves or their horses until the work was finished.

CHAPTER XXI.

BUFFALO BILL LEADS.

With Buffalo Bill in the lead, and good horses under them, Lieutenant Willis knew that the pace would be a good one, and the others knew it, too.

There was great anxiety on the part of the scout to reach the little command in camp and push for the retreat of the outlaws before, in any way, word could reach them of the capture of their chief, the failure of their last attempt to rob Ned Nordeck's coach, and that their game of crime was drawing to a close.

For this reason, both Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Willis were anxious to push on.

But they could not go beyond the strength of their horses, and they must remain for hours in the camp when they reached it, for rest.

Buffalo Bill's brain was busy, however, and suddenly a thought flashed upon him, and he called back, as he was leading, to ask Lieutenant Willis to please ride up with him.

The officer at once spurred to the front.

"Well, Bill, anything wrong?"

"No, sir; on the contrary, I have an idea I wish to suggest to you."

"Go ahead."

"You know that the coach relay station is about six miles from where the sergeant's camp is."

"Yes."

"As the trail bends around the range, it is really nearer to the outlaws' retreat than the camp."

"Well?"

"They keep there some twenty horses, and they are all good ones."

"I know that."

"Now, why can we not push at once for the relay station, and get fresh horses in place of these we ride, while Brazos Ben and another scout make all haste for the camp, and tell the sergeant to saddle up and meet us at a point on the trail we are to take?"

"Splendid!"

"By doing this, sir, we can, by dawn, be twenty miles from the camp, and, with comparatively fresh horses to push on with."

"The very thing to do, Bill."

"The men can stand it, sir, and will gladly accept the hard work, while, if you wish, you can leave the prisoners at the relay station, under guard, to await our return."

"No, Bill; we will take them with us, for Captain Cobra is a perfect devil; he has money in plenty, you may be sure; men are human, so can be tempted, and I do not care to risk him in the care of the stock-tenders at the station."

"That is true, sir, so along the prisoner goes with us."

"Yes."

"But I will send Brazos Ben on to tell the sergeant to move at once, and head us on the trail, as we go by the relay station."

"By all means; and Brazos Ben will know just where we are, to join forces."

"Yes, sir; but not a word is to be said to the stock-tenders of where we are going, as you know we do not know whom we can trust; in fact, it would not be best for me to go on to the sergeant's camp, carrying the prisoners along, so the men then would not see them, and you can get, at the relay station, fresh horses enough for all of us."

"That would be the better way, Cody, and your horse that you ride now can be carried on to where we join you on the trail, and there staked out somewhere, to await our return."

"Yes, sir."

Brazos Ben was called to the front then, the plan explained to him, and he also said it was the best, while he remarked that there was a point ten miles from the sergeant's camp and seven from the relay station, where the two trails joined, and there the separate commands could meet, the first one to arrive waiting for the other.

So Brazos Ben was to go with the lieutenant, the corporal, and a soldier, the rest, with the prisoners, to accompany Buffalo Bill.

Half a mile farther on they parted, and Buffalo Bill led on, at a still more rapid pace, knowing that he would not have to depend upon the horses they rode to carry them on to the retreat.

It was just midnight when the scout and his party were challenged by the sentinel at the little camp.

The sergeant was up, and greeted Buffalo Bill as he dismounted from his horse, and the command was at once called to get ready for the march.

Sergeant Long learned of the capture of Captain Cobra with delight, and was glad to find out that all looked so favorable for the running down of the entire band.

"Our horses are all fresh, sir, and can stand a ride of seventy or eighty miles well at a push, with rest at the other end of the trail, and we can make it without a hitch, never fear," said Sergeant Long.

Then he continued:

"Now, sir, I wish to tell you that there was a visitor to our camp, whom I thought best to hold as a prisoner until your return."

"Who is he, sergeant?"

"He is a man who has been to the fort occasionally, and lives the life of a hermit, being a great hunter.

"There are many who say he is one of the outlaw band, and he certainly knows all about them.

"He came into camp yesterday, and wished to see you.

"I told him you were not here, and then he asked to see Lieutenant Willis.

"Telling him also that he was absent, he told me that he had recently made some important discoveries about Captain Cobra and his men, and wished to lend his aid in hunting them down."

"This is strange, indeed; but he may be a spy."

"So I feared, sir; and, when he said he would come again, I told him that he must remain, that he could not leave, as he knew of our camp there.

"He made no resistance, said I was right, and asked to have a couple of men go with him to his camp to see to his

stock, as he had not expected to be gone long when he left.

"I sent Scout Dot Driver with him, with four other men, fearing a surprise; but he took them to his retreat, and affairs there were as he said.

"Then he mounted a good horse he had, and returned with them."

"And is here now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know his name?"

"They call him Panther Pete, sir."

"Ah, I have met him.

"Bring him here, sergeant, and we will have a talk with him."

The sergeant soon returned with the man, an old trapper, who had lived alone in the wilds, and had the power to tame panthers and other wild beasts.

He was manacled, but did not seem to mind it, and said, without using dialect:

"I came here to see you, Mr. Cody, for I wander this country at will.

"I knew that you had not returned to the Northwest, as reported, though the outlaws believed you had, for I see them often, as they stop at my camp.

"A short while since I discovered just who Captain Cobra was, so I at once determined to hunt him down, to lead a force, headed by you, against him.

"Captain Cobra has sought, time and again, to have me act as a spy for him, but I have told him I was no outlaw.

"Driven here to seek a life of seclusion, and nurse my sorrows in secret, I yet have been honest in my life, and, though thrown in the path of the Cobras, I have not been one of them.

"As thee came a climax in my life a while since, and I discovered who and what Captain Cobra was, I determined to hunt him down.

"For that purpose I came here to your camp to seek you, and serve as your guide, for I can lead you to his new retreat.

"Will you trust me, Mr. Cody?"

Buffalo Bill looked the man steadily in the face for a moment, scanned him then from head to foot, and then, to the sergeant's surprise, said:

"Yes, I will trust you; and you can accompany us, for now I know you.

"But I, too, know how to find the new retreat of the outlaws, and I have with me Captain Cobra, his ranchman, Jacinto, and three other prisoners, all of whom go with us to see that we find their stronghold."

Panther Pete's whole face changed at the knowledge that Captain Cobra was a prisoner, and at first he seemed fairly stunned; but then he said, earnestly:

"At last! At last my revenge is complete!"

CHAPTER XXII.

KNOWN.

Sergeant Long, surprised at seeing how readily Buffalo Bill believed the story of Panther Pete, was more surprised when the scout told him to take the irons off the prisoner, and said:

"You will ride in the lead, with me, Panther Pete, for we start in a few minutes for the Cobras' retreat."

"Yes, sir; but I wish that you had a few more men."

"Lieutenant Willis and a few more will join us ahead on the trail; and, then, the Cobra force has been cut down by three killed the other day, their officers, Moccasin and messenger Viper, that I cannot account for, those of the band who were kidnapers, whom Lieutenant Willis and I know the fate of, besides the chief, Jacinto, and a trio of prisoners the sergeant has here."

"Yes, I think we have men enough for what remain, Panther Pete."

"So do I; and I believe you will find every man you have not accounted for in the retreat, for those were the orders, sir, and so you can make a clean sweep of them."

"That is what I wish to do."

"Are you ready, sergeant?"

"All ready, sir."

"Then we will move," and Buffalo Bill rode to the front, with Panther Pete by his side; the sergeant and soldiers came next, then the pack-animals, the prisoners, and the scouts bringing up the rear.

The pace set was a good one, and, after ten miles, the trail came out into a valley, where they found Lieutenant Willis and his men awaiting them.

A change to the fresh horses was made, and it was time, for the horses of Buffalo Bill and those who had come on with him from Captain Cobra's ranch were about used up.

"I brought Harding, one of the stock-tenders, on with me, Cody, to take the tired horses back to the station, for I know both men there, they being old and faithful soldiers, who were honorably discharged a year ago."

"You know best, sir," replied Buffalo Bill, and the stock-tender started slowly back with the worn-out animals.

Then a start was made again, Buffalo Bill leading, with Panther Pete, as before, and about whom he had said a few words of explanation to Lieutenant Willis, who had been surprised at seeing the mysterious man with the party.

"I can save you many a mile, sir," said Panther Pete, and Buffalo Bill was not long in finding out that such was the case, as now and then he would turn from the trail on a cut, and would come into it at another point.

"How did you know of the retreat?" asked the scout.

"I have hunted all through there, and, when the Cobras told me where they were, I knew at once the camp they had selected."

"Taylor Travis was my foe from boyhood, for there has been a feud between his family and mine for three generations, and a score of deaths on each side have been the result."

"His grandfather began it by robbing my grandfather of his sweetheart, and a duel followed, and thus continued."

"All knew that some day either he or I would die by each other's hand, but I would never have pushed the feud had he not done so, and one day fired at me in the streets of a village near our respective homes, when my wife was with me."

"I was badly wounded by one shot, my wife was killed by the other, but by accident."

"A foe of mine had told him I had sworn to kill him at sight, and was looking for him, taking my wife along to protect me."

"This was proven in his favor, so he escaped."

"I recovered, and went abroad, for I had means, and, while returning home by way of San Francisco, news reached me that my little daughter had been drowned in the river near my plantation."

"I never returned home. She was all I had left, and, drifting about the West, I at last settled in these wilds as a hermit."

By the time Panther Pete had concluded his story, the scouts had been guided to the outlaws' stronghold, and they went into camp, deciding to make the attack at night-fall.

The battle was won by the scouts and soldiers, though the Cobras fought with terrific desperation, and would not cry for quarter until three-fourths of their number had fallen.

Lieutenant Willis had been slightly wounded, four scouts and two soldiers had been killed, and half a dozen more had received wounds, so the victory was dearly won, but Buffalo Bill had escaped unhurt, though in the thickest of the fray.

A camp of a couple of days was made in the canyon; and then, the dead having been buried, and carrying the wounded on wooden stretchers, the little command took up its march, by easy journeys, to Fort Taos, where Travis, or Captain Cobra, was executed.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 77, will contain "Buffalo Bill and the Renegade Queen; or, Deadly Hand's Strange Duel," a thrilling story of the great scout's fight against the Sioux Indians.

CURIOUS DREAMS



Things are running along in fine shape now, boys.

The contest has shown itself to be a winner, the biggest yet.

Remember that the neatness and legibility of your story counts for something.

The contest is so close that the least little thing counts, and the boy who takes pains to make his contribution look nice has a better chance than the boy who does not.

Look on page 31 for full particulars.

A Railroad Dream.

(By George Fennel, Pa.)

I will now relate to you as best I can a dream I once had. It was in the winter; the snow was about a foot deep. My mother and I went to the train to meet a friend that we expected. On arriving there we found that the train had already pulled in, only stopping for a short time. We had to hurry to see if our friend was on the train. We looked about the depot, and not seeing her, we got on the train, to walk through, thinking that she may have been asleep and had not awakened, and might go on through to some other station.

As we walked through the train we did not find her until we were in the last coach. She was all ready to get off, and we said, "Come on and get off." She replying, said, "This is not where you live." We told her it was.

She looked out of the window, but did not attempt to move. We waited for a while, and I was just going to ask her if she was not coming, when we heard the conductor say, "All aboard!" We started for the door, and were going to get off when we found to our surprise that the door was locked.

We went back to her, and she said that there was a prisoner in the car, and they had to keep the door locked for fear he would escape. And then she said that we did not live there any way, that we lived in the next town.

We began to wonder if we did. We would have to go to the next station any way before we could get off, as the train was going too fast to get off without getting hurt. So we sat down with her, and were talking when we heard the conductor unlocking the door, coming after the tickets. He walked along through the aisle without collecting a ticket from any one, as no one had got on there but us.

He stopped when he got to us for our tickets.

My mother told him how we had been forced to stay there.

He said, "I am sorry, but if you have no tickets you will have to get off."

He took us both to the door, and unlocking it, kicked us off. We were just going over a great, long high trestle, and so we had a great distance to fall.

It seemed as though we had fallen down into a hole in the ground, and where we came face to face with the prisoner that was in the coach we had just been kicked off.

He knew us the minute we saw him, and he said, "I believe you are the people that are mistaken as to which town you live in."

I replied that we were. He told us to follow him and that he would take us home.

The hole we had fallen into was a sewer and it emptied into the East River,

To follow him, we had to jump into the water and swim down as he did.

When we started down we had to go under the track. Just as we were under the tracks we heard a loud noise, which was the train that we had just been kicked off.

We could hear the noise, but the water was going so swiftly that we could not get back to see if any one was hurt, as the train came rolling down the bank.

We were finally thrown out into the East River, where I awoke.

Landing a Tarpon.

It was a lovely April morning when a party of gentlemen from the North started down the Bay of Naples, Florida, for tarpon.

"We had separate boats," said one of the gentlemen to the St. Louis *Republican* reporter, "and a man to row

us. It was understood that in the event either of us got a bite the other was to time the catch, as we wanted to make a new record, the best then being about two hours from the time of a bite to that of landing a tarpon. I was fishing with about eighty feet of No. 15 line and one of the best rods and reels made in the country. I had my line out but a short while when suddenly there was a click, click at the reel, and almost simultaneously up shot seven feet of the prettiest silver fish that ever glittered in the sunlight. You know the tarpon always jumps clear of the water the moment he strikes a baited hook. As soon as he struck the water again there was a report as sharp as a pistol shot, and my pole snapped right in the center. I was chagrined and disappointed, for I felt then that my chances of ever landing that fish were very remote. Nevertheless I grabbed the pole where it was broken, and, with my right hand on the reel, waited for his majesty to slacken up after his first run. He jumped four times clear of the water while running away, my man in the meantime following him up in the boat as fast as possible. Then I began to reel in the line, and after what seemed to be an hour I had him near enough to the boat to be gaffed.

"But here was another difficulty to be met. My man was alarmed at the size and strength of the tarpon and declared that he was afraid to gaff him with his hook, as he was certain he would be pulled overboard. After persuading him that I could rescue him in case of such an accident he was induced to make the attempt of landing the monster with the gaff hook. No sooner did the tarpon feel the steel than he made a sudden dive, snapping the hook and pulling Robert almost into the bay. Off he went again, jumping eight or nine times more, until he carried out nearly my entire eighty feet of line. Then I began reeling him in again, my man at the same time getting another gaff hook and fastening a line to the handle so as to avoid another accident.

"I knew my only chance of getting that tarpon was in gaffing him as soon as possible, for with my broken pole the strain on me was terrible, and I felt I could not play him much longer. When I had reeled him to the side of the boat the second time Robert took good aim and with a powerful lunge drove the hook right into his gill just as he was about to make another jump. He then lifted him bodily from the water into the boat, and in a twinkling had thrown himself on him and nailed the struggling giant on the bottom in genuine Græco-Roman style.

"I sank to the seat exhausted, thinking I must have been several hours at work, when one of the gentlemen exclaimed, 'You're the luckiest man I have ever seen. Wit a broken pole you have landed that tarpon in just fifty-six minutes.' It was true, I had broken the record, but, let me tell you, I had to remain in my cottage for three whole days afterward in consequence of the sport."

The Dream of the Snake King.

(By P. C. Saucier, La.)

About six months ago I was hunting in the Allegheny Mountains. I had hunted all day, and toward evening I came upon a small ravine, where I decided to camp for the night. I was gathering wood for a fire when I came upon a giant rattler. I grasped a large stick and

immediately began war. After a hard fight I succeeded in killing it. I then proceeded to gather my wood when I came upon two more. I killed one of them, and the other got away. After this I got into my blankets and went to sleep. I then dreamed a remarkable dream. I thought I was in the great temple of snakes. There was one monster that was covered with silvery scales, and I thought he was the king. He lay coiled upon a stool of gold, with his head erect. I thought the two rattlers that I had killed were there and were testifying against me. There were thousands of others there, too. I thought that the council sentenced me to be cut in small pieces and offered as a sacrifice to the king.

The king of snakes then took a small vessel, filled with fire, from the stone pillar, and set it on the ground in front of me. He then gave the signal and the other snakes advanced, with gleaming eyes and terrible mouths, to cut me up in threads. When they were upon me, and all had raised their heads to bite me, I gave a start and woke up. When I did so I was in deadly peril, for there was a rattler coiled up beside me. I dared not move. I slowly slid my hand along my side and grasped my revolver, but he had seen the movement and gave a low hiss and raised his head to strike. I quickly took aim and fired, blowing his head half off. I was terribly frightened, and did not go to sleep for an hour or more.

A Witch Dream.

(By Henry Smith, Minn.)

About four years ago I had a dreadful dream. We boys were full of jokes and tricks as most boys are. There lived an old colored lady a few blocks from where the gang hung out, and who we thought was a witch.

One day as we had her after us, she got so close as to spit upon me. I ran as fast as my legs could carry me, and reached home in time to escape.

That night I had her in my thoughts till I fell asleep. Some time after I had fallen asleep I thought I felt her arms about me, but could not cry out. I jumped out of bed and ran into the next room, where I saw several more witches.

I then ran into the pantry, got a butcher knife, and ran back and commenced to cut them down.

Suddenly I was seized from behind and knocked out of doors and bound to the porch post.

When I awoke I was lying on our back stairs.

A Dream of the Devil.

(By Chas. Morgan, Conn.)

One night I went to bed rather early and dreamed I felt a sharp pain in my side. I looked around; there stood an imp with a spear in his hand, with forked teeth.

That imp was one of the 103 imps, all subject to their king, the devil, who wore a crown, from which fire poured forth.

Two horns protruded from his forehead. He had a peaked nose and chin. He breathed fire from his mouth and nostrils.

From his upper jaw protruded two long, sharp teeth,

three inches long. The nails on his fingers and toes were long and sharp. His body was green.

He sat in a big chair surrounded by fierce animals, fire emitting from their mouths and nostrils and had glittering eyes.

The imps were dressed in the same way. When I looked at the imp he was grinning, and he blew a whistle. Then my door opened and in marched ten imps and brought me to their king, who said:

"What is the charge against this rascal?"

"Well," said the imp who captured me, "he stole a pocketful of apples, a cookie, a pie and was fighting."

"Well, give that wicked boy punishment before me."

So he took me in the ducking-room and dumped me in a tub of hot water and poked me with forks, but I lived through it all. Then they took me to the drumming-room, where one hundred imps were pounding on pans. They placed me in a ring to roast me, but I lived through it, so they made me walk a rope as fine as a thread, but I fell down, down, down, into a valley where snakes crawled out of their holes and stung me. Below stood the 108 imps to catch me as I passed, and then when I reached land I hurt my shoulder on a stone. Then I awoke and found myself in bed instead of on the rocky bottom of the valley, and Tabby Gray, my favorite cat, was playing with my nightshirt.

A Trip to the Moon—A Dream.

(By Charles G. Breden, Jr., N. Y.)

Grand Excursion to the Moon!

On the Large and Capacious Airship *Luna*.

Excursion Tickets, One Dollar.

August 14, 1940.

So read the tickets which we (my chum and I) presented at the door of the elevator which shot us up aboard the airship. We had for a long time been waiting for a chance to visit the moon, but previously the fare had been so large as to be entirely beyond our means; but now that the price had been reduced to one dollar, we were on pins and needles until the day arrived.

The *Luna* was truly magnificent, and when we boarded it, we received the impression, but for the vast mica inclosure, that we were on board a large steamer. The mica inclosure, we understood, was used so as to keep in the artificial air when we reached the high atmosphere. There were two decks, which were fitted up in handsome style. On the upper was the house for the "sky pilot," looking in every way like the pilot-house of the sea pilot.

By the time we were ready to cast off, the airship contained over a thousand passengers, but owing to the great size of the *Luna* there was still plenty of room to move around.

We were off! The great "wings" began to move slowly up and down, and then, as we rose higher they moved faster and faster, with a great roaring sound, until soon the earth was a vast map below us. My chum and I had seats on the upper deck, and we were in a position to fully enjoy our aerial voyage.

There is nothing to equal a ride through the air. It fills one with an exhilaration unknown anywhere else, and not to be compared. We passed through a storm-cloud, with its deafening roars and blinding flashes, and then, as we left it behind, we saw above us, and on all sides, the beautiful azure blue sky.

Toward noon we landed on the moon and, with the rest of the excursionists, we started on our explorations. The hand of man had wrought a wonderful change in the moon's surface. Everywhere were well-laid streets, containing magnificent hotels and residences, and we could tell no difference between the city of the moon and a city of the earth but for one thing—there was not a particle of grass or verdure of any description.

I have not the space to tell all the extraordinary things we saw, but what pleased and astonished us most was the wonderful caves which were to be found at every hand. The winding passages disclosed to view many rare sights in the way of beautiful crystalline and remarkable reflecting rock that cast forth all the colors of the rainbow. The caves were entirely composed of this rock.

As we proceeded deeper, we noticed that the air became very close and hot. We inquired why this was so, and were informed that far beneath us was the fiery furnace that cast forth the light that illuminated the earth.

Toward five in the afternoon we boarded the airship for the trip home, having spent a most enjoyable day. As we left the moon, something seemed to break and we seemed to be slipping at a terrific speed down, down, down.

I awoke with a start and found myself on the floor. I had probably eaten too many crabs the night before.

My Dream of an Adventure with a Grizzly Bear.

(By Leo Legler, Cal.)

I dreamed that my father and brother and I had built a little hut in the Rocky Mountains, where we used to go every summer hunting and trapping.

One day I took my rifle and started out to hunt. I went up an old path in the mountains. As I got near the river I saw a small rabbit. I took aim and was about to fire when I was startled by a growl in back of me.


I wheeled around and there, coming down the path, was a huge grizzly bear.

I took aim and fired. A loud growl told me that I had hit him. I looked and saw blood coming out of his ear. I turned and was about to run when the bear struck me on the arm with his paw, tearing my buckskin jacket and flesh. I turned and began to run, and when I looked around and saw he was gaining on me I thought I was gone when—

Crack!

It was the rifle of my father and the bear fell dead at my feet.

Then I woke up.

 \$1 worth of Tricks & Make-ups, sent postpaid for 25 cents stamps or silver. Also: Keweenaw or Bull Head, Little or Big Whiskers, any color, Berlin Spirit (Ours to stick them on). Box of Burnt Cork to blacken up. Lin. Rubber Mouth, big teeth, secret & apparatus for performing the great vanishing half-dollar trick. This big offer is so get your address to send my large list, cut it off, place, vice, tricks & apparatus. Instruct yourself. Mention paper you saw this in and I will also put in a Heavy GOLD plate finger ring FREE, send size. Address Chas. Marshall, Mfr., Lockport, N.Y.

HERE'S A NEW CONTEST! A CORKER!

The Contest just starting is going to be the greatest we ever ran. It's an entirely new idea. The Prizes are new and the finest we ever offered. The other contests held in the **BUFFALO BILL WEEKLY** have all made splendid success, but this one is sure to break all records. Why? Because it is a brand-new idea—a contest every boy in America has an equal chance in, and because the prizes beat anything ever offered before. All you have to do is to write out an account of any of your

Curious Dreams.

Everybody has had remarkable dreams, and anybody who sends in an account of one has a chance of winning one of the prizes. They consist of

THREE FIRST-CLASS PHOTOGRAPHIC OUTFITS,

Including Camera and all Appliances for Taking and Developing Photographs.

Five Hunting Axes and Five Hunting Knives.

Think of the fun you can have this winter with one of those cameras. You can take and develop photographs of all your friends. Full directions go with each camera. Think how useful and handy a first-rate hunting knife or ax will be when you go hunting or trapping in the woods this winter.

To Win a Prize.—Write an account of any curious or remarkable dream you have had—no matter what it was about. Tell it in five hundred words, and send it with the coupon you will find on this page, properly filled out, to the **BUFFALO BILL WEEKLY**, care of Street & Smith, 238 William St., New York City.

HERE IS A LIST OF THE PRIZES:

The three boys who send in the three most interesting accounts will each receive an **Eastman Pocket Kodak**, with complete outfit. The camera takes picture $1\frac{1}{2} \times 2$ inches; uses film, and has capacity for twelve pictures without reloading; weight six ounces. This wonderful little camera takes pictures equal to the most expensive. It makes negatives of such sharpness and definition that beautiful enlargements of any size can be made from them. Has perfect Achromatic Lens of fixed focus, Rotary Shutter, with sets of three stops, square View Finder, and covered with fine Seal Grain Leather. Takes snap shots or time exposures. Easily carried in pocket or on bicycle. Complete with roll of film for twelve exposures and Leather Carrying Case, with room for three extra film cartridges.

The five boys who send in the five next best accounts will each receive a **Safety Hunting Ax**. Dimensions over all 11×4 inches; weight 18 ounces. The blade is made of solid tool steel, finely tempered and highly polished. The handle is made of mild steel, nickle plated on copper, with handle plates of engraved hard rubber. The guard is of sheet steel, hinged on a spring in such a manner that either open or closed it is firmly held in position. The construction is unique

and of such a nature as to make it almost impossible for one part to become detached from another. The head has an oblong semi-circular recess milled in either side to receive the slotted end of handle, which is accurately milled to a close fit and firmly held by a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch steel screw. This method of handle fastening prevents any liability of the blade working loose on the handle. The upper part of the handle is slotted on the under side to receive the folded sheet steel guard, which is so arranged as to be firmly held by a flat steel bar when open or closed.

The five boys who send in the five next best accounts will each receive a **Sportsman's Ideal Hunting Knife**. There is about as much difference in point of utility and beauty between one of our "Ideal" hunting knives and any other knife on the market as there is between a grizzly bear and a porcupine. They are hand forged, hand tempered, hand tested by the rigidest possible test and finished in a manner that makes them the handsomest knives in the market. The "Ideal" knives are made with 5-inch blades, leather handle, brass and fibre trimmings, with polished stag-horn tip. A handsome black or russet case with each knife.

Now, Boys, You See Your Chance!

It's Up to You to Win a Prize!

COUPON.

BUFFALO BILL DREAM CONTEST.

Name.....
Street and No.....
City or Town.....
State.....
Title of Story.....

This Contest closes **December 1st**. All entries must be in by that date.

Remember, the "**BUFFALO BILL WEEKLY**" has the greatest circulation of any weekly descriptive of Indian warfare ever published. Your story, whether it wins a prize or not, has a chance of being published, and will be read throughout the length and breadth of the Continent.

BUFFALO BILL STORIESth

(LARGE SIZE.)

Containing the Only Stories Authorized by Hon. WILLIAM F. CODY ("Buffalo Bill").

- 48—Buffalo Bill's Secret; or, The Trail of a Traitor.
- 49—Buffalo Bill's Phantom Hunt; or, The Gold Guide of Colorado Canyon.
- 50—Buffalo Bill's Brother in Buckskin; or, The Redskin Lariat Rangers.
- 51—Buffalo Bill's Trail of the Man Tigers; or, The Doom of the Branded Hand.
- 52—Buffalo Bill's Boy Pard; or, Training the Buckskin Boy.
- 53—Buffalo Bill's Vow of Vengeance; or, The Scout's Boy Ally.
- 54—Buffalo Bill and the Mad Hermit; or, Finding a Lost Trail.
- 55—Buffalo Bill's Bonanza; or, The Clan of the Silver Circle.
- 56—Buffalo Bill's Mascot; or The Mystery of Death Valley.
- 57—Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon Scout; or, The Brave Dumb Messenger.
- 58—Buffalo Bill's Mysterious Trail; or, Tracking a Hidden Foe.
- 59—Buffalo Bill and the Masked Hussar; or, Fighting the Prairie Pirates.
- 60—Buffalo Bill's Blind; or, Running the Death Gauntlet.
- 61—Buffalo Bill and the Masked Driver; or, The Fatal Run Through Death Canyon.
- 62—Buffalo Bill's Still Hunt; or, Fighting the Robber of the Ranges.
- 63—Buffalo Bill and the Red Riders; or, The Mad Driver of the Overlands.
- 64—Buffalo Bill's Dead-Shot Pard; or, The Will-o'-the-Wisp of the Trails.
- 65—Buffalo Bill's Run-Down; or, The Red-Hand Renegade's Death.
- 66—Buffalo Bill's Red Trail; or, A Race for Ransom.
- 67—Buffalo Bill's Best Bower; or, Calling the Turn on Death Notch Dick.
- 68—Buffalo Bill and the Gold Ghouls; or, Defying Death at Elephant Rock.
- 69—Buffalo Bill's Spy Shadower; or, The Hermit of G and Canyon.
- 70—Buffalo Bill's Secret Camp; or, Trailing the Cloven Hoofs.
- 71—Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake; or, Hunting the Paradise Gold Mine.
- 72—Buffalo Bill and the Black Heart Desperado; or, The Wipe-Out at Last Chance.
- 73—Buffalo Bill's Death Charm; or, The Lady in Velvet.
- 74—Buffalo Bill's Desperate Strategy; or, The Mystery of the Cliff.
- 75—Buffalo Bill and the Black Mask; or, The Raffle of Death.
- 76—Buffalo Bill's Road Agent Round-Up; or, Panther Pete's Revenge.

Back numbers always on hand. If you cannot get them from your newsdealer, five cents a copy will bring them to you, by mail, postpaid.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,

238 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK CITY.